The Cenacle

8th Anniversary Issue
Number 48 April 2003

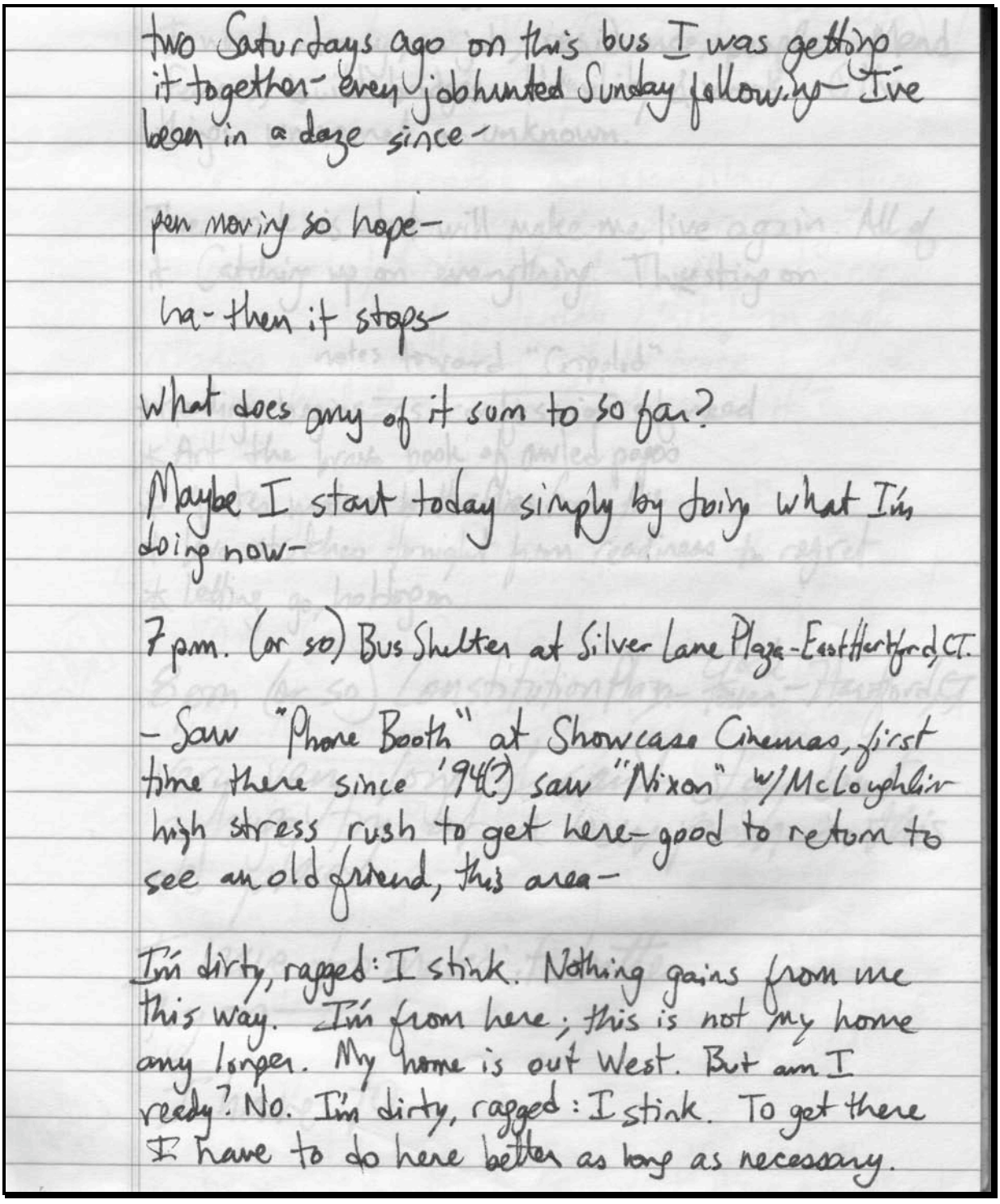
Amanita Muscaria

"If you're lonely
and behind the wheel
when the ground gives way
you have to pray
to the unknown
and hope it's real . . ."

Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers,
"Like a Diamond," 2002

FROM SOULARD'S NOTEBOOKS

[April 19, 2003]
[New Britain-to-Hartford bus]



two Saturdays ago on this bus I was getting it together- every job hunted Sunday following- I've been in a daze since-

pen moving so hope-

ha- then it stops-

What does any of it sum to so far?

Maybe I start today simply by doing what I'm doing now-

7 pm. (or so) Bus Shelter at Silver Lane Plaza-East Hartford, CT.

- Saw "Phone Booth" at Showcase Cinemas, first time there since '94(?) saw "Nixon" w/McLoughlin high stress rush to get here- good to return to see an old friend, this area-

I'm dirty, ragged: I stink. Nothing gains from me this way. I'm from here; this is not my home any longer. My home is out West. But am I ready? No. I'm dirty, ragged: I stink. To get there I have to do here better as long as necessary.

I need money, a job, residence, people. Mend fences, build bridges. Humility & work. Other things unnamed or unknown.

The work is what will make me live again. All of it. Catching up on everything. Thresting on.

notes toward "Crippled"

* Healing begins as confession of need
* Art the brave book of awled pages
* Master makes butterflies from fire
* Love stretches tonight from readiness to regret
* Letting go, holding on

8 pm (or so) Constitution Plaza - Clock Tower - Hartford, CT

very very long & can't stay but a huge try at a new poem in this old place

I have to make it better
try on—

I have to.

6x36 Nocturnes, VI, #36, Lasting [for Meg Wisq]

XVIII. Crippled

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax. Now conjure
at will. Finger the shimmer in things.
Now strum at will, ~~now~~ but fail; Now shriek
for a swath of yesterday flesh! - an angle
receding no magick can rightly trace Eyes were
praying kind to a moment, where is it?

New moments ~~await~~ expect new pilgrims. Join or
be damned. Raise or dwindle.

9:10 p.m. (or so) Civic Center steps - Hartford, CT.

[sent V25 #4]

6x36 Nocturnes, VI, #36, Lasting [for Meg Wisq]

XVIII. Crippled

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax. Now conjure
at will. Finger the shimmer in things.
Raise a telling strum, fail. Raise, & again.
Shriek for a swathed yesterday flesh! —
an angle receding no magick can rightly trace.
Great eyes were praying kind to a moment.

Where is it? New pilgrims ride on. Join or
be damned. ~~Raise or dwindle~~ Raise or dwindle.

[sent V26 #4]

9:20 p.m. On board Hartford-to-Utopia Mall bus

-Ok well so far this is going alright- two more buses after this-

"Crippled" is a tough nut but Ok- It contains clock tower, burst out there- just needed a trace of tweaking-

Part four of "Things Change?" began at Cement Park- the statues were cleaned- not green n' more-

That's about as good a poem as I can give- it's true & it's music. Confessional but not soft.

The Cenacle

8th Anniversary Issue
Number 48 • April 2003

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Front cover photograph by unknown photographer. Back cover by Raymond Soulard, Jr. Front & back cover design by Raymond Soulard, Jr. *Cenacle* logo based on design by Barbara Brannon.

Accompanying cassette features highlights from the April 28, 2001 & May 26, 2001 Jellicle Literary Guild meetings, both held at Roma Restaurant, New Britain, Connecticut.

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Thank you to Gerry Dillon for taking me in when I wasn't very much to behold…thank you to Kassidawn Kramer for a friendship I am still working to earn…thank you again to Sean, and to Llyra & Clarica, for making Seattle feel like home when I was there, & likely will take me back warmly when I at last return…

JUDIH HAGGAI

Soft Reflections Going Nowhere

wandering softly now
bleeding into cosmic melt
blurring long gone fantasy

painting the connection
linking love through all
soundless song erratic

a swish of thought
immense, self-confident
claiming past in crucial
permanence

walking selfless thru self
embracing moments as here
swallowing life like a kiss

soft reflections going nowhere
exhaling hope anew

Branches Brush Your Hair

when i remember
those branches dripping winter promises
your lips speaking in snowbound heat

you called my name, the wind called harder
you, again and again
as branches brushed your hair

on bended knee you'd sing to me
mouth to lip
tongue to longing

as i walk through whispers
left on my heart step
i melt like an icicle
blown wide
in nurtured sunburst

You, Yeti in full blooded
wonder
stark raving fear
tossing love like medallions
feeding self in starvation

when i think of you
i pull forest twigs
from your hair
and suck the sap of life

Light Thru Trees

it's a slow sunset hinting eve
thru leaves intent on pumping green
i love the sound of silent agreement

day has had its laughs
its cheers and chocolate treasures
as the whisper of pause takes hold

wait for me, i'll catch your shadow soon
in friendship and in parting
as light blinks thru stubborn leaves
and i rest my head on life

A Mellow Look at a Pillar of Salt

tossing and turning a fast look
from where i see it
we've come a short way
from seashell haven

once upon a time
i crawled in crocodile backlash
chomping thru tempestuous waters

i leaped upon lily pads
in evolutionary fervour
survival! fit to be tied
i sighed onto the nearest beach

eating coconuts, washing potatoes
i found myself expanding my repertoire
two plus two, along the avenue

Noah! save me, baby
inching onwards
past ETs and UFOs
i tossed my 3rd eye in the basket
of charms
snake oiled and massaged
into Thai omega

back home to waters
calm with human refuse
Ganges holy
sanskrit ohm, we
levitated to rat-race space
workin the land
and paintin it grey

was it just yesterday
they told me not to turn around...?
and here i go
riskin it all
for a mellow look
and a pillar of salt

Spirit World Restless

humping under the carpet
spirit world is restless

earth shattering windows
spirit world is waking

doors, roofs, rattling loose
spirit world is hissing

punches fly, shotguns load
spirit world is angry

tanks to fields, people flee
spirit world is roaring

bombs crash, flames climb
spirit world seeks vengeance

jesus born, buddha floats
mohammed mourns, moses sighs
prophets phlegm, goddesses sick
chaos builds, heaven faints

swords, flowers, dinosaurs
water steams, lava sears
why not give in. spirit world takes off
hitch a ride to genesis
toss aside your emptiness
catch the next wave out

RAYMOND SOULARD, JR.

Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

"Think for yourself
& question authority"
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Four
continued from
The Cenacle / 47 / December 2002

At the beginning of 1997 I was pretty disillusioned with *The Cenacle,* with my whole life really. It would prove to be a hell of a year, but pretty satisfying by its end. Huxley in "The Doors of Perception" urges people to become what in fact they are. I did this by leaving my job, by engaging with the psychedelic sacrament LSD, & by delving deeper into Art—sometimes supported by others, but often completely at odds with contemporary mainstream ideas.

By choosing to apply to MFA programs rather than Phd English programs I was for the first time in my 32 years putting my writing under the scrutiny of strangers, their credentials, their judgment. I received 6 rejection letters out of 7 applications. In the first *Cenacle* of 1997, #16-17 Winter 1997, I sharded these rejection letters & presented them to the magazine's readers. Impersonal, indifferent letters, deserving an even worse fate frankly. On the next page I published a copy of Emerson College's acceptance letter (oddly, no less impersonal, & demanding money up front). I feel grateful to Emerson College for accepting me & yet . . . yet . . . I soundly damn the process. To receive such anonymous scrutinies of one's art, whatever the form, is iniquitous & antithetical to the completely good creating impulse native to existence.

But I knew this: I was moving in the right direction. I would go to Emerson College in September 1997 & figure it out from there (& I did :)).

On 1/4/97, I sent the following letter to *Cenacle* contributors, about 9 in all. It announced:

> *[T]here will be four issues a year which feature at most a quartet of contributors, the better to highlight the works of each. There will be additionally two double-issues, one devoted to collecting the works of many people . . . the other which puts one writer's work under the spotlight . . .*

Already I was pressing the year for something good; this was about six weeks before Emerson College's acceptance letter. Come it did, shortly after the letter which I chose to open *Cenacle* 16-17. In this letter I expressed where I stood:

> *In the last few months I've sunk ever deeper into my soul, heading straight into, through, and past a certain estrangement I felt from my work. Truly, matters such as* Cenacle*, Jellicle Guild, MFA programs, the outside world and its varied opinions of my pen, no longer matter as much. I understand my obsessions better, my sins, my wounds. On good nights of work, everything falls away and I am lying on the surface of eternity, comprehending what I can of it.*

Once I had the acceptance letter in hand, my confidence waxed. I pressed forth with *Cenacle* 16-17 & my new conception of it as outlined in the letter to the contributors. *Cenacle* 16-17 is an issue more devoted to continuity than breakthrough. It features over a dozen new poems by Ric Amante, the first in a series of autobiographical letters by Jim Burke III, & the usual large presence of my poetry and prose. One new feature which does appear is on the second side of the highlights tape, an interview I did with Ric Amante on 3/1/97 at his home in Everett, MA. A portion of our dialogue ran:

> ***Soulard**: tell me about Godd . . .*
> ***Amante**: well, of course this is something I cannot tell you about, you knew that . . .*
> ***Soulard** (laughs)*
> ***Amante**: any man who thinks he can tell you about Godd is lacking in humility because . . . there are no answers . . . and everybody tries to approach Godd . . . and that's a noble attempt, I do that myself . . . in my best, quietest moments, I try to approach Godd . . . but I realize that any efforts expended toward that are futile . . .*
> ***Soulard**: yah*
> ***Amante**: Godd is mystery, Godd is cosmos . . . Godd is the force that has brought us all here of which we have ultimately nothing to say . . . we can probe it as deeply as we want . . . philosophically, poetically, however . . . whatever tack you want to take, Godd is elusive . . . and that is how Godd should be . . . Godd is a quest,*

> *Godd is a journey . . . Godd is the force behind our actions that we think we're getting closer to, and we often do get closer to . . . whether it's through love or it's through poetry . . . or through whatever. . . there are all these breakthroughs in our mortal minds that we think we have that ultimately mean shit . . . because Godd is the force that suspends and uplifts us in our both weakest and strongest hours . . . and we'll never know what that means . . . and that's good, that's good . . . because Godd is a mystery. . . .Godd is a force that I always try to get close to in my poetry and my life . . . Godd is always one step ahead . . . Godd is always the force beneath the force . . .*

Around this time, early spring of 1997, I was given the chance to try LSD. I can truly say that my life changed radically thereafter. Writing this 2 1/2 years & many subsequent psychedelic trips later, reviewing the facts of 1997, it is more obvious to me than ever that the night I first tripped was the night I crossed into a new kind of existence. *Cenacle* 16-17 makes no mention of this experience. From *Cenacle* 18 on, no issue would fail to mention it.

Among the more expressible reasons I tried acid was my years-long obsession with the 1960s— that decade's unbelievable wealth of music, idealism, & consciousness expansion. I was reading at the time many books trying to make sense of what had happened in the '60s. Aldous Huxley, Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, & Robert Heinlein testified in exciting ways about exciting things, about a hope for greater communion between persons, between humanity & nature, between any given individual & the cosmos. Secret joy amongst these times . . . What it came down to was: I had to know: I had to walk through the Door.

Walk through I did on 4/6/97 & the next morning I wrote the following poem, published in *Cenacle* 18, which concluded: "Art: the horn cleaved in your heart/ as you dangle in the reddening darkness." And on 4/15/97 I wrote in a letter to Jim Burke III (which also appeared in *Cenacle* 18):

> *Taking acid showed me that Art is illusion but, I have decided,* I do not believe this. *Acid is a path. Art is a path. Sex is a path. You see, Art has been and is my only hope. Not woman or religion or money or even friendship. Beyond all these is Art—beyond Art is silence and annihilation. I choose life—I choose Art.*

It was a delightful time in my mind no matter that I was months from Emerson College. Even the cover of *Cenacle* 18, a quote from the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) "Port Huron Statement," in the shape of a peace sign,

reflected where I was going. *The Cenacle* was growing because *I was growing*, & because I chose to take it with me, & because I was beginning to glean what purpose it was for: advocate for artistic & social & individual freedom, a vehicle for disseminating reports of various kinds from what Huxley called the "Antipodes" of consciousness.

Cenacle 18 also featured my poem "Ruby Virgin Subversives" which I felt was the best poem I'd ever written & in subtle ways anticipates the explorations I was bound for in 1997.

> *new universe of segueing flesh*
> *governed from strong want, busted out*
> *each day disfigures me more happily*
> *sing to me, a mirthful canker, sing*
>
> *The Ruby Virgin is mine henceforth*
> *twisting into knots my weaknesses and dreams*
> *allowing my red madness when it comes*
> *applying wet skin to my rotten seams.*

Others around me were changing too. Ric Amante, native of Massachusetts but sometime resident of many American cities, had decided to move to Seattle where he'd lived before, & take up again with a longtime love. He departed on June 14, 1997. Between then & his eventual return on October 7, 1999, we would see each other only twice, in 1998, once in Seattle, once in Boston. In that time, however, we did a great amount of collaborating.

When the fall came I was still working on *Cenacle* 19 June 1997, but determined to catch up the project by the end of the year. This plan succeeded; *Cenacle* 19 was finished in September; *Cenacle* 20-21 Summer 1997 was finished in October; *Cenacle* 22 October 1997 was finished in November; & *Cenacle* 23 December 1997 was finished in December 1997 & made its triumphant debut at the 12/27/97 Jellicle Guild meeting.

Cenacle 19 captures the fading traces of a magazine that will change more in the next few months than it had in its nearly 2 1/2 year existence. Jim Burke's letter continues his ongoing discussion of the dangers of technology (though it also has some sage wisdom for my return to graduate school); Ric Amante's poems are culled from those in *53 Poems* that had never been in *The Cenacle*.

Where the issue does look forward it does so tentatively or abstrusely, the first in my comments in "From Soulard's Notebooks":

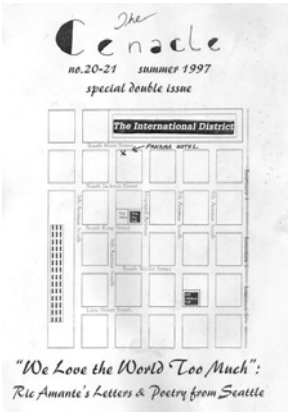
> *A month after I leave [my job], classes at Emerson begin. I hope that goes well. I hope I luck into a situation, unlike the present one, where what I am is what they want.*

the second in the kind of new, vaster, more metaphorically *turned-on* poetry I was writing:

> *I wanted immaculateness—*
> *first bright corpse in this young desert*
> *I wanted immolation—*
> *ready to surrender colors; desire's newest loss.*

What was now set in motion would continue to accelerate, *continues* to accelerate.

Cenacle 20-21 Summer 1997 is entitled "We Love the World Too Much—Ric Amante's Letters & Poetry from Seattle." Its front cover lettering was composed in MS Word rather than hand-lettered, first time. I now had access to computers at Emerson College, & took advantage of this. The rest of the issue is typed & laid-out by hand, an aesthetic choice having to do with the decidedly non-technological spirit of the work. But I was now willing to experiment with what was available to me.



In 11 letters & 9 poems, it tells the story of a man reuniting with a sometime home of his, sometime lover of his, finding lodging, finding work, keeping his spirits up through Art, wine, love, & faith. Few persons I've known are capable of living Amante's sometimes itinerant, sometimes sedentary life. The final letter in the series, dated 9/21/97, finds him ensconced in the Panama Hotel, hungover but hopeful:

> *I'm feeling very peaceful tonight, Ray—peaceful, grateful, whimsical, fey . . . . Maybe that hard cider scorched some old synapses or widened my ventricles . . . .*

This issue is decorated with various ephemera Ric often included with his letters as well as reproductions of portions of his actual letters. It was fun to make, satisfying to communicate Ric's West Coast adventures to his many far-flung friends, satisfying as well to successfully publish an issue featuring just his work.

Cenacle 22 October 1997 moved the retooling of the magazine along in many ways. Many of the pieces now contained section headers. Barbara Brannon's cover artwork of the New Orleans Preservation Hall previews her notebook of New Orleans drawings and impressions within. My essay "Be Now, Here: Swamped with Presence by the Work of Jorie Graham" is derived from a presentation I gave in a

poetry workshop at Emerson College. Many of my poems in this issue were discussed in this same class. My "Soulard's Notebooks" prose responds at length to the timidity & distasteful conventionality I was being hit with in Emerson's MFA program.

Somewhat satisfying, & certainly new for *The Cenacle*, was the appearance of R.S. Steinberg's fiction "Particles." Steinberg was a fellow MFA student & the first contributor not of my longtime circle to publish in the magazine. His odd story has the following genesis:

> *The idea for "Particles" came from a gallery talk I heard about Gerhard Richter, the German painter, who starts some of his work with a real image, like a snapshot, and then repaints it in stages by technically changing edges, textures, and so forth, until the result is quite different from what he started with. He calls himself an anti-abstractionist: the 'anti' means that the principle of abstraction is not some conscious aesthetic idea of his, but the automatic working of the technical transformations.*
>
> *To make fiction that way I started with three banal images. I let the random number generator in my computer choose the sequence in which I would attend to each of them, and then allowed lugubrious imagination to generate detail.*

It was a satisfying experience overall to edit & publish Steinberg's work; & to debut the issue at the 11/22/97 Jellicle Guild meeting at Jacob Wirth's Restaurant in Boston with him & other two other Emerson students in attendance.

One other feature began in *Cenacle* 22. "Notes on Contributors" contrived in part to give Steinberg's explanation of his story a suitable place in the magazine & partly to fool with yet another piece of conventional periodical apparatus to see how well it worked in *The Cenacle*; it worked better the second time around, in *Cenacle* 23 December 1997, when I made the feature my own, telling the truth rather than simply the facts about my friends.

Cenacle 23, December 1997, the 18th issue in 32 months, was debuted at the 9th anniversary & 72nd meeting of the Jellicle Literary Guild. I was very pleased at how the year had gone & that I'd beaten the clock to get this issue out on time, a feat I hadn't accomplished in over two years!

At 88 pages the issue was the longest one yet & contains many pieces of which I'm still proud. The table of contents' claim of six issues a year is fulfilled, all the pieces have headers & nifty stylized font page numbers. My opening "Notes

from the Picasso Exhibition" benefits from illustrations & the fact that I saw the exhibition at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts three times. Jim Burke concludes his series of autobiographical letters thus:

> *One cannot deny the influences of the past. When these influences are realized and accepted, the truth surfaces and boredom is avoided. I now see boredom as leading to uncontrolled action. The individual's karma cannot identify truth and a circle develops, much like the drinking I alluded to earlier. We must accept where we are at present and deal with it on an individual basis; that is, our relationship to the cosmos.*

Other pieces include Brannon's "Chicago Sketchbook," which continues our joint effort to get new work of hers into the magazine. My story "Love Her Madly (a new fixtion)," part one of three, premieres. Ric Amante debuts ten new Seattle poems prefaced by a funny letter. The "Notes on Contributors" sound like they belong with the rest of the magazine: funny, loving, true. Plus there's the back-of-book feature debut of *Cenacle* mini-posters "brought to you by Soulard & LSD." This one is "It's OK to Be Happy," an acid revelation from 12/6/97. I also solved a problem I had with the art for the front & back covers by switching them so that the front's pretty little holiday scene is complemented by the back's cosmic "Stars belong to galaxies, and planets hug the sun, but comets travel all alone: a universe of one." The *Cenacle* highlights tape side 2 features voices of the Emerson College students from 11/22/97 Jellicle Guild meeting though I must admit that I hadn't found the brother I was looking for among Emerson's ranks. But eventually I did. He was there all along in my poetry workshop. It just took a night of psychedelic bonding for the truth to manifest :) Joe Ciccone's work would be vitally important to *The Cenacle* & Scriptor Press in 1998 & beyond.

I was delighted with 1997 but I wanted so much more. I had begun my relationship with Emerson College, read poetry at their graduate student reading series, been awarded $500 for *The Cenacle* from the Graduate Student Association (despite the fact that the GSA president lost the copies of the magazine I gave him & so never got to look at them!), made *The Cenacle* look more polished even as I was discovering how radical were portions of the message I wished to propound through it. Oh goodness! Did I want to go furthur!

[To be continued in *Cenacle* / 49 / October 2003]

RIC AMANTE

Campobasso

Father kept a gallon jug of Cucamonga
red wine next to the frying pans
on the brown linoleum floor of the pantry cupboard.
It was a thin, purplish, unremarkable vintage
smelling of weeds and turpentine.
Tonight I drink from a jug of Campobasso,
the New York version of his California wine.
Father drank two glasses with each meal,
then a quarter-glass more to accompany and savor
his biscotti, cigarette, and contentment
of a good woman, four good boys,
and a home his hard labor kept making.
Tonight I drink from a jug of Campobasso,
and though I have no woman, no boys, no home,
to recall with affection how Father
would take a plastic bread bag and
place it over the neck of the bottle
before screwing the cap back down—
my doing so now somehow saves me.

Another World is Possible

In the hushed timelessness just before dawn
a silver coyote faithfully trots up the snow-covered trail
to the summit of Password Mountain.
It reaches the beveled granite peak,
gazes east to the red strip of light extending across the bay
to the abyss of its wary eyes,
and as the first curved sliver of sun
nicks the seam of the horizon,
a litany from another world breaks the day
into the peace and promise of creation.
And this is its untranslatable cry:

Another you is possible
another me is possible
another cloud is possible
another eye is possible
another book is possible
another fuck is possible
another name is possible
another hit is possible
another kind is possible
another is is possible
another tear is possible
another vow is possible
another zest is possible
another pest is possible
another ex is possible
another sex is possible
another god is possible
another death is possible
another wave is possible
another us is possible
another out is possible
another joy is possible
another quake is possible
another ray is possible
another love is possible
another all is possible.

RAYMOND SOULARD, JR.

Blue Period
[A New Fixtion]

{Continued}

"Who?"

"When you find him, he'll help you. But you have to say all of this for me. It's what I would have said. But he died & I was gone one day from this. I couldn't say it if I wanted to. I let go. But he should know this. He deserves this much."

Rich nods. Keeps nodding. Finds himself unable to stop nodding, each swing of his head wiping irretrievably a patch of the brief world in which he had sat. Where to now? . . .

I rip back into singleness. Rebecca, harshly expelled, aches & shivers.

"I'm sorry. But that's all bullshit."

"With my dad? That?"

"Yes. Like it's ever so easy."

Rebecca looks at me carefully, almost shyly. "Does it always have to be so difficult?"

"It has to be real. It has to make sense."

"I don't understand. What happened that was wrong?"

"It's not that easy! There's never even that much certainty!"

She says nothing. Tho we are no longer entwined, she gives me what she can with calm closeness, with hands and eyes.

"I'm sorry, Rebecca. But I messed up. I can't undo it. Something will have to work out on the other end."

She tightens into me. "It's OK."

I'm drunk while writing this. My young lover seems far away. I've been out with a buddy. We gave into doubt—and liquid comfort.

Even now, I feel her pull. She doesn't reject me because I fall.

"My pants are soaked with booze."

"It's OK. I love you."

"Rebecca, I'm old. I'm fucked. I'm on a train far from you. Our scene has collapsed. This is me needing to write anyway."

"Ray, calm down. Nothing ends here."

"I'm fading. If I get off at the right stop, it will be a piss-big miracle."

She won't let go of me. She is increasing.

"Be drunk. It's OK!"

Arms embrace me that should not. A beating heart salves me that should not. She keeps saying 'It's OK' until this becomes truth, until faith takes over & all else is swept into the night.

We roll off the bed, twined within each other again, & onto the stage at Luna T's Cafe, roll toward the back off the stage, a fused trunk of carnal-high flesh, & strike lightly the back wall, now touching the Goddpink on all the walls at T's & begin to roll up the wall, held by it, veritably carried along by it, & on up the wall & onto the ceiling, sloshing in Goddpink, steered by Goddpink, sex with the Goddpink the many hands that touch & hold, the several mouths all ways at once, I will take you, Rebecca, beneath these words, behind this night, your eyes eternal spring all over my face, resurrection, now, are you listening to me? am i? resurrection now you are the virgins that the part of me back there in the writing Cambridge night has been watching all night with dull fantasies regarding how their mouths shall be stuffed with their last unbloodied panties as I pluck their cherries with my solid intent, how pleasurable spreading virginal buttocks is for view & visitation & how every good taking deserves a gratuity the taste of virgin nipple & virgin clitoris, the bathing of shivering virgin now had but more than this the tripping into better life with better hopes a train crowded but nude bodies writhe happily, a virgin wondering & an introduction by soft hands that will offer not only cunnilingus but the secret songs of oaks, the vast plentitudes of Godd's many unknown traits, the way love can be so sheerly soft & lessons on how the pussy exposed between soft young thighs, the cock growing shyly hard, is only scripture wild beginning of the damnéd, blessed fuck fucking great openhanded promise the universe makes continuously to eyes that simply see, hearts that still, unveil, & wait

not life as a thrusting lesson, a dull blowjob negotiation on a rotten rainy night

There is a soft laugh somewhere without our sphere of Goddpink immaculate sexa and several eyes open & down below is the tall figure of Dr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, smiling.

"Rude observer that I am, admiring your private dance, I was nonetheless lost in a reverie from my days visiting Brook Farm. There were mornings there where the veritable assembly of us would awake in a, um, garmentless heap—and on occasion decide we were pursuing the best course after all & so on went the day's activities in similar mode."

Rebecca looks at me & we exchange thoughts. "He talks like that!" I exclaim. She nods &, catching the Doctor's eye releases the Goddpink & me & is caught in all her lovely young nudeness by him.

"I'm Rebecca," she says. "We haven't talked so much yet."

"You can call me Waldo or Doctor or whatsoever you like."

"Would you help me to dress?"

He looks up at me of course. I let myself fall easily to the floor. Leaving the warmth of the Goddpink, I shiver. "It's OK. She's as enlightened as the sun. She likes you."

Rebecca stands golden before him smiling. He kindly approves her form, appraising her smilingly. "My dad likes your books. He reads them to me. He says you're like a famous cult figure, a secret hero."

Dr. Emerson smiles. "When will I get to meet your father?"

"Sooner or later. He's looking for his dead wife."

Dr. Emerson steps back, hurt, frowning. "I did that. I followed her right to her grave & unearthed her. There she was." He breaks off, deeply sad.

Rebecca leads him to the little table neath the front window. I follow with her clothing. Somehow I clothe myself along the way without ceremony. Dressing Rebecca is the point here.

He sits on the edge of his seat & is extraordinary gentle in touching her. Rebecca disdains brassieres these days, wearing instead a sleeveless t-shirt beneath her blouse. A movement of arms, bending forward of head, two pairs of eyes enjoying each other.

He nearly shrinks when she sits on his lap for the shodding of her lower half. Appeals to me, seems to want a jealous protest.

"Trust her," I advise, enjoying immensely their gentle touching & the various lights & shadows on her body.

"Doctor," I say suddenly, "Have you ever tried LSD?" Foolish if funny question since Herr Doktor Hofmann did not discover that Godd-in-a-microdot miracle until the 1940s.

I explain its hallucinogenic & visionary qualities & the Doctor wriggles my young love's slim pink panties over her waist. He pauses there. We've got him. He's ours for awhile. No question. He'll stay the summer.

"Young lady, you would have loved my friend Margaret Fuller," he says as he tussles with Rebecca's blue jeans.

"And cranky Thoreau in his hut?" Rebecca is now dressed but not only does she remain in Dr. Emerson's lap, she holds his hands in hers.

His smile again is shot through with remorse. "No dearer brother to me than him." He embraces Rebecca softly, then with emphasis, and awaits her next wish.

She nuzzles her cheek to his. He is still, enjoying. "My dad was right about you." Stops. Thinks: "He's always right anyway, when I can get him to say much."

Dr. Emerson departs to the barroom where Knickerbocker no doubt has grown up fresh denouncements of the Concord poet.

Rebecca & I are alone again & now she is in my lap & our embrace is simply ferocious. She tongues my ear as I massage her inner thighs; we square our talk within this ecstatic bubble.

"Ray, we have to be ready when my dad comes back. We all have to be believers in one way or another."

"Can I agree with you without understanding?"

Her hands begin to play but I don't feel led to a fresh writhing so much as a broader sight of things. I hear Rebecca's soft low voice even as our mouths fasten & tongues penetrate.

"I'm free of school. I didn't tell you."

"You didn't."

"There was a ceremony the other Sunday. Remember that afternoon I wouldn't, um, stop?"

"You told me there was something good waiting for us if we got past soreness & exhaustion. You were right."

"It was that day. I told them my cradlerobbing lover wouldn't let me attend unless I brought back some of my younger friends for him to enjoy."

"I'll write to you from jail."

"That was it, Ray. That day. No more."

"College?"

"No. Maybe not ever but not now. We've got to do this here."

Dr. Emerson is suddenly back, sheepishly asking for a pen.

"Wise Dr. Knickerbocker really has set my mental capacities to agitating again," he says ruefully. Amused.

I fish out an extra black pen of my own. "Keep it. I write like you half the time anyway."

"You'll have to instruct me in your methods & modes for the other half then."

"Rebecca thinks our Godd-obssessed millennial machinations are more important than attending college."

Dr. Emerson is quiet. "I think," he says slowly, "that she is most needed here. And if she ever does attend college, whether she be five-and-ninety when it seduces her fancy to do so, their enlightenment factor at that blessed institution shall double its figure." He bows slightly & parts.

"Does he really talk like that?" she asks me, hand inside my shirt, caressing.

I close my eyes & imagine us entwined on the steps of the empty Rohm Tech building, after midnight, thus Carnal Street, ZombieTown, Mass. Grateful Dead music drifting through the air, live 1969, psychedelic philosophizing of "Dark Star" midnight this Saturday morning as I find her beating heart beneath her young breast & set myself to synchronizing with it, set myself to pulsing & cloud & hands around her soft form

Shall we go
you and I
while we can
through the transitive nightfall
of diamonds?

the earth & the UFOs are curious both so we are pressed closer together from above & below & I want to find with this girl each of us our new virginity what amounts to a sacred knowingness a release into the universe where soul follows orgasm that never ends that pulses in and out forever that adds new notes to the

cosmos's Eternal Song, continual pulsing in & out, new notes, Rebecca & I have never stopped releasing & receiving since the long diamond night of our first loving & I want to live my life hereon in the continuous spirit of the long night, its music, its colors & moans, perfect virgin unafraid because certain, shivering because it could only be better tomorrow here after it doesn't have to ever end our dreams are always awaiting us nothing's over I love you Ray I love you Rebecca and we probably left this dull era's consciousness not far into the long night and now she is completely in my grasp my trust she is the promise to me as I am to her ZombieTown green mad with weeds & esp Carnal Street & the curious UFOs who desist rather than cause harm how far can we go Rebecca with all of this? how protected in Luna T's? Will it inevitably go wrong no matter that these stories have fucked & got so-drunk & higher highest & tripped & blinked happily before hashish smoke & marijuana smoke these stories are on the bus Rebecca whatever's left of the bus in these later lesser days I don't want to think about losing you but won't it happen suddenly the clock says not divine 1966 or even badass 1968 but forlorn 1973 worse dark 1979 or demonic 1985 or nunnish 1993 or shit can it really be ragged 1998 me well into my 30s you nearly 18 nearly legal by their laws

"Ray, stop."

"I'm sorry. I keep thinking that I have no chance. And so I think we all have no chance."

"No. I am here. I am the promise. You have made a covenant with Art by loving me, by making me happy. I am the promise that Art will never desert you as long as you live."

"You're my lover."

"That's what I'm saying."

"I can't see."

"Should I let you go?"

"No. Not til we make it to Sunday. And not much then."

"OK. Good."

iii.

Well inside this story now, yes, yet lost at the moment, with notes & charts & notions, even alluring dreams, none of which pin my arms & push me in a certain direction.

So, OK, begin anew inside of so many other beginnings. Say:

Not a story. Not a song. But begin. The paradox of feeling lonely on this softskinned night, smiling souls passing by, the air liquored with the scent of live blooms, the rousing thought, even, that here, the Boston Common, was where Dr. Emerson during his original life walked & mused, the old fountain's sensual watery jangle, many lights & trees, Beauty living here & now lonely & tired, bitter that tomorrow's early workday necessitates tonight's early bedtime.

And: not a train, rumbling here, but get on & ride: this time too soon but is any such mundane experience without its obscure chapel? Hell, I've written on trains, kissed on trains, been drunk & stoned on trains, sung & sulked & schemed on trains, hard acid-tripped on trains: what else? what more? or the better question: what now?

Time is my own soul inside my own fist; freedom is blood how I flow; love bears diffused starlight, burnishes & knows; and Art speaks all Creation in a tall horizonless monologue, soliloquy for a trillion voices, drumming tells the planet's story.

Blue Period. No doors. Just sky. A woman's shadowy back rises 30,000 feet into the capitulant air. No souls, scattered all around, folded beggars people the street, retching elegies. No tears, dark seas of them, a last bath before water no longer cleans. No dreams, no maps, ton-heavy, old blind guitars savaged of their music, prefer memories to melodies, umf.

Nothing at All, Here & Now, Rhythm & Lights. Boats ground ashore. Bars never closed. This night does not convince me, fuck it all.

And on—

To continue with the night, with this peculiar passage that is generating itself from frustration & faith.

I am sitting at a subway station in Boston while half-submerged within Luna T's Café in a fixtional city called Hartford. Soon, I'll be on the train bound for the town wherein my hovel awaits, bluenote ZombieTown, Mass.—and still I'll sit at the bar at Luna T's Café where my young love Rebecca Americus is sitting next to me working her art between the study of an old book & the blank pages of a new one. At the bar as well sit Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, Dr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jim Reality III & several thirsty, grizzled regulars—

"I'm on the train to ZombieTown now!" I announce to a ragged cheer from my companions.

"Does the train from Boston still run out to Concord?" asks Dr. Emerson of me.

I nod. "In fact, you & all of your friends are world-famous. Walden Pond is an internationally-known nature spot. The cemetery in town, various birth places. Sir, you fringy upstarts form much of the backbone of American literature. Hawthorne, Thoreau, yourself, Fuller, Melville, Whitman—"

"Young Whitman?"

"& Emily Dickinson, too."

"Who?"

"Of the Amherst Dickinsons."

"I don't know her work."

"Look" says Rebecca brightly, closing her book of Early Picasso pictures, pushing forward the sketch she'd been fussing over.

A nude woman, long dark hair streaked by clouds & vultures, but with beautifully rendered white hands pressing down on the knees of her crossed legs.

Dr. Emerson studies the picture lengthily. "This is Miss Dickinson, Rebecca?"

"It's what her poetry is like," she smiles.

One loony drunk at the bar, high off many Miller Lites with whiskey chasers, bellows "I came here to drink! I came here to look at pussy! I came here for the fucking jukebox. You're all just a bunch of eggheads all sad that American literature these days is bespangled & bespattered with millennial na-da & postmodern cultural recycling. This place is as old & useless as yesterday morning's first piss & fart!" He stumbled, untucked, to his feet & staggers out the door.

We wait for nearly a week while I am sick with flu—and when I am ready, we resume.

"Orange juice, bud?" smiles Mr. Bob, & I nod.

"I'd like that other kind of orange juice," brightly pleads Dr. Emerson.

"Screwdriver?"

"Sir!"

Rebecca ministrates to me lightly, hands & eyes. I sip my juice, tell her quietly that she's sweeter & more medicinal, pat my cheeks with her smile whilst the nosy assemblage groans over me writing down such pap, & finally hush everyone by offering up the story of my sickness.

"Thy sickness is a well-chronicled tale! Thy healing is yet a thin blank volume!" yells Dr. Knickerbocker quietly, almost hurt that I did not consult his doctorly attentions.

Rebecca looks down at her pad then reddens when she sees me watching. "Sorry. I've had to wait a week," she whimpers.

I touch her hand. "Draw. I love you. But listen, too. All of you. I am so glad to be in your company tonight. I am blessed. Thank you, Godd."

"You're welcome," quips Godd the Little Pink Bear, arrived, in pajamas, for my story. Naturally, Rebecca is Godd's chosen pillow. "With yr permission" Godd sez, jealously, coveting my praise & story but dubious over Rebecca's first important suitor.

"*Lolita* is considered Nabokov's finest novel, one of the 20th century's best," I offer weakly.

"Hey, you guys, I'm not 12!" Rebecca yells, slamming her artbook around.

Dr. Emerson comes round to break up the fracas. "Rebecca, my friend, my beloved wife Ellen was hardly older than yourself when I wed her" his soft hands & smile do the rest as he assumes Rebecca's company at seats far down the bar & Godd & I are left with no intermediary.

"Basic Tenet of Transcendentalism #1" Godd & I mutter in unison, then, delighted, are fast friends again.

The grizzles far down the end of the bar sip mugs of Schaeffer & one wonders aloud about the lack of women in the bar. "Yah, & the rising tide of pink be'ahs" sez the other, amused.

Another round of drinks, TV off, radio volume lowered & I launch us all into my tale.

"I fell sick a week ago but it was really more of a collapse—from many pressures, the result of an implosion & explosion wrestling. I cancelled plans. I unplugged my phone. The TV was often on as I saw shows good & fool, movies made when I was a teenager, sports. I sweated. I shivered. I cursed. I'm not fully well yet."

"Confound it! Saloon-keeper, retrieve my medical bag from its hidden location! I shall seek this young sinner's malady through the mires of his flesh & swamps of his soul!"

I was nearly assaulted w/Dr. K's cane when I refused his examination. Somehow we all calmed & I decided to hurry ahead in my tale.

"This past Sunday night, when another man's nocturnal underworld would have shown him the mercy of deep, dreamless sleep, mine took me over completely & twisted & tortured from my dreaming mystical hinterlands an all-night vision from which I could neither rise nor sink."

The barroom quiet, even the grizzles listening, among them Godd the small pink bear, gaining friends by quaffing a fair share of booze, gaining friends by Mr. Bob's putting all the booze on Godd's Cosmic Tab, removed from further weak acts of proselytizing by Rebecca with an admonishing but charming smile—

"End this happy man's prose!"—someone yells.

I calm down & talk on. "It was like tonight where I am in a nifty old armchair in the basement of a Boston coffeehouse & here with all of you" I smile to show, politely, that noone fucks with my writing—and that includes Anyone & Someone "when that night I writhed in sick bedclothes & created from my depths a most fearsome castle."

I hurry on, my time in the coffeehouse running out, my sickness rallying because I am letting it: "it existed & didn't—was unknown to the local villagers but famous enough for faraway travelers to visit—its door could only be reached by occasional waves of mystical air—it was as important as elusive—and yet I don't know who lived in it—"

"You!" Many voices shout.

"Nor what it was really about" & I am glad noone replies to this.

"But I know I was sick & that I've never dreamt such a profound dream while sick before—never a dream where my imagination whipped up such writhing majesty." I pause. "I didn't go to work on Monday because I was so exhausted & even today it's still with me."

Noone speaks.

"Another, bud?" Mr. Bob softly queries the blue-eyed guitar mystic at the bar. A nod, a martini, that being gin-no-tonic, is prepared & served.

"Hi, Jim!" I say all friendly.

Jim Reality III sips his drink, swirls, delights, returns, & smiles. "Your castle sounds interesting," he says, neutrally.

"How?"

"Some say that home in dreams personifies self."

I protest that the castle is my home necessarily, but am trampled by verbal crowds.

"OK, fine," I growl. "Then the dream is about my elusive, misunderstood soul, least acknowledged by those near me."

Jim sips but says nothing.

Rebecca assumes my embrace almost invisibly & I see her next sketch: a gaunt skeleton, barely a man, with a half-Earth bowl of clouds & stars, trying to give these away to fat groups of passersby, eyes shaped like X's, exposed asses tattooed by dollar signs. I look at her searchingly. "Don't look, everyone!" I shout & kiss her fiercely & long.

"Remember, Dante's Beatrice was only 8!" shouts one of the grizzles.

"But he was all of 9!" rejoins another to delighted guffawing.

"Poe married his girl-cousin!"

"To get at her mum's cash!"

Tired of all this, I rob my young love's cradle of her place at the bar & we adjourn to the barroom. I'm hoping we can talk but I see that some of the local college kids are hanging around.

"You're the manager, throw them out," I whisper. She smiles & shakes her head.

"May we sit with you?" she asks the ragged bunch sitting at the famed—& reserved—little table beneath the front window. Two boys & a girl. I feel very dislocated with my excess of age, my genuinely ragged clothes, my doubt-bespangled belief in the Dream.

"I'm Rebecca."

"You're Rich's daughter! Hey, Rich, good to meet you, man. What a high." The thinner fellow in a grey cloak, beard framing his face, probably sandals & shrooms & literature on hemp about him somewhere.

"That's not my Dad! That's my lover, Ray Soulard, Jr., writer of this story," she says proudly, damn her loyalty & love.

"It works better without last names" I growl at her. "At least call me Baudelaire, will you?"

The hippy kids stare at me. Finally the girl, blonde, whose body moves beauty sans interior cuffs, smiles. "I saw your magazine. It's good. Why call it the *Cynical* tho?"

I stand. But Rebecca is drawing again, is warm, is my friend, & I sit again.

Now the third hippie talks. Bushy hair, holding a guitar, sez "When are they playing? We're just excited, yknow? They're like our Velvet Underground."

Rebecca's tip-crushed pencil is going full-board now—and an answer of sorts is given—a face like Americus's, looking across the page to one like Franny's—from somewhere her pink crayon appears—I remember one night a very good idea we used regarding that very crayon—and a long dash of waxing & waning widths nearly connects them—Rebecca continues to fill the page—peace symbols, broken Army jeeps & an embedded legend beneath its arching pink dash reads: "to the flashing

water say I am—" & so this is news of Americus, in a way; the hippys say "far out" & "groovy" & "bees knees" ("they didn't say bees knees!" remarks Rebecca, laughing) & I hurry to get the short brownhaired neatly dressed psychedelic avatar that these kids dearly need—Jim Reality, unloosed from his barstool only after invited to play guitar & presented with a large pitcher of martinis for his pleasure—

and once again Rebecca is transported across state lines for purposes allegedly involving corruption of youth—that is, we go into her manager's office &, carnally, close the door

Since she became manager of Luna T's Café, Rebecca has done little to change this room, more often the scene of the enjoyment of sex, drugs, booze, & rock music than that of managerial activities.

She decides tonight is the night—& I warn her not to touch the couch or I will submit myself to whatever authorities there are to prosecute a sinner for unlawful carnal knowledge of a fixtional minor—

She smiles—behaves unspeakably for awhile—then rolls away from me & begins her task—

I watch darkly as she walks around but what worry? She clears the desk of old paperwork, changes a lightbulb, straightens the Chinese print Luna T installed on the wall behind the desk years ago, sorts the LP collection & dusts the old phonograph & applies fresh tacks & tape to the many pictures & posters clinging to the wall—Jimi Hendrix, Beatles, Woodstock, Noisy Children Live in '89 at Luna T's Café! & so on—then sits beside me on the couch assuming I will soon ravish her again.

"Is that all?"

"I guess. I've never been a manager before. Do I need a phone?"

"No!"

Later on, Rebecca straightens her girlish frock, weeps for awhile

"Stop it!"

asks me for comic books & candy

"Ray!"

"Yes, Dolly?"

"Rebecca!"

"Sorry." But she has to kick me & push me around & during this my, ah, desires absurdly reassemble themselves—

Ah, Rebecca. Ree-beck-ahh. Life of my loins! Loins of my night! Light of my—

By the time we return to the bar I reveal my begrimed soul outwardly & Rebecca—Ree-beck-ahh—has removed from her person most evidences of my clutching attentions.

Someone at the bar is yelling "The binds of love are ill to loose!"

Two days go by as we return to the bar—I am feeling sick again.

But push on—manuscript of my truths, words of my dreams, less doubt & more doom than ever.

Rebecca leads me to one of the tables away from the heavily-populaced bar. I sit & watch her work on a new picture.

"You can talk to me. I can draw & listen, too."

"I love you, Rebecca."

"I love you. Pull your chair closer."

"My world is cold. I am alone. I'm sick. I sit in the basement of an old Boston house & yet its current hosts offer no hosting. No hellos save for the total of your bill, no wish for a pleasant day. Young, ignorant, squealing & ugly, huddled behind the counter, against everything. Not fit for dinner with their awled hides, muchless to go around as people."

"You hate everyone!"

"I hate dumbtongued brutes with no grace. I hate followers of parodic fashion. I hate those who rarely bring hate themselves to the table. Cows! Sheep! Animate turds! Fouling the air & the sky & the land & the trees, the paths & the water. Noisy beyond sanity. Joyless containers of barren spasms. Freakish devotees of No & Shit & Fuck & Us & Them."

Rebecca is watching me, but unafraid. "You love me. You love Luna T's Café. You love Art & Godd & anyone anywhere who tries to say something real."

"I am mostly alone in that fat, empty world. Its lie assaults me every time I leave my house. I would suffer less if I conformed more. It's that simple."

Rebecca pulls me even closer, then slips more deeply into her drawing. It is a shadowy portrait of Dr. Emerson & Dr. Knickerbocker, an empty stool's length apart at the bar. I listen to their talk, grown wonderously quiet. Dr. K speaks.

"I've had a long life, a healing man amongst the infirm, a sinner amonst sinners."

"And do you adjudge it to have been a good one?"

Knickerbocker is quiet, drunkenly sloppy with his 12th or 20th coffee laced with whiskey.

"I cannot say. I do not desire to say. The Lord is my mortal Accountant, if he be."

"'If he be'?"

Voice inflating, "Sir, I beg you to desist sprinkling my plain meat of honest doubt with your child's sugar of certainties! If there be Lord, there be Lord enough for us all, a feast of Lord with every assortment of vittal & viand. If there be no Lord, the ravenous Cosmos shall soon enough consume us at its lonely darkling board."

Rebecca uses pencil & eraser, moving the two old male bodies closer & closer together, obliterating their garments, working dimensions into their backs that, like neighbor mountains, lean invisibly closer to become one visible scape.

"Many was the friend I lost whilst still a young, groping man," says Dr. Emerson. "My faith became my skeleton, upholding my gentler skin of hope."

"Faith & Hope are combatants in the field! No more!" yells Dr. K. His walking cane begins to flail about & Mr. Bob the bartender has to leap over & calm

him down. Dr. Emerson is unperturbed, smiling, now invited to join my girl-artist & me at our table.

"He likes you," says Rebecca.

"I know. Heaven has sanctioned my acquaintance with one more brilliant eccentric."

I nod, the scholar, all-knowing. "Jones Very. Father Taylor. Bronson Alcott."

Dr. Emerson's face twists around while studying Rebecca's picture. "Why not two trees? I'm no mountain."

Rebecca looks up & smiles very brightly. "I trust myself."

He nods, undone, & returns to his simmering friend.

To be hopeless, no longer expecting. Wisdom of the unspent syllable. Endless moment, empty warmth, hopeless touch. Grey walls inclined inly toward the ground. Bells sound, cries and commands, rubber memories, plaster dreams, for them, sound, the street's crowded face, or someone else, or nobody, for nobody at all, here tonight, ease me, lord, ease me, no-lord, instruct my idealist's hands what to do, how to run, how to take over.

All that remains are soup, sickness, absinthe, hopeless, no longer expecting, bells sound, cries & commands, endless moment of lord, of no-lord, ease me, relieve me, make me ever softer until I die. Die, all of us, time now, die, boats ground ashore, all of us, this bar will never close, the world is never seen, let me be a bright rose, pulsing, lord, no-lord, let me no longer make a sound.

She watches me now, going amongst my words, her home, the reality of her world. She draws but doesna look upon her page, extended being, touching my words & distracting me, leaving the least sketch, in brown pencil, of a mother & child, an ocean, I try to look more but break up, forget, tire, lord, no-lord, this girl-artist is my answer—true? yes, true. to just one question or all of them

"it's ok"

"I'm sick. I can't maintain this."

"it's ok"

Another night in my burning world whilst hardly a minute gone by at Luna T's Café.

A need for evaporation, most of all, & to give Rebecca something I can give her whilst evaporated—

"Daddy! Franny!"

Disintegrating sparkle of language, the no-words of blowing in the Spirit, yet she wants to talk to them. She knows Ray did this for her, doesn't really know why, but accepts it OK.

"Dad, are you really here?"

Rich Americus blinks. "I suppose so."

Franny looks thin & tired, but mostly desperate. Not looking at Rich, she says, "You don't have to leave her again. You can let me go. I'll still love you, Rich."

He doesn't look at her. "Too much is gone already. I won't lose you. There's no going back." He raises his arms & she moves closer

Rebecca is trying to—but she can't

I am writing this down, Ray, since you're gone right now. You made my dad & Franny appear but they were hopeless & sad. So I had to soften them into my picture. I looked at my Picasso book & I found a picture of a mother & baby & it was blue & sad but it started me somewhere, it started me going into a better space, the art space, the space inside my heart, the lonely spaces, I brought all of this to these lonely spaces in my heart, I don't even usually draw about them, they don't want to be pictures, but this night has been hard & I know that it's up to me to end it, with this picture, these lonely spaces, & I guess that I have to bring all of it

iv.

Approaching the story's half-way mark, & ready to cry & give up. Perhaps just sickness keeping me from feeling the night's warm tips. Not new failure, continued misunderstanding, ransacking praise.

Pages pathetic that somehow fight to increase their number. A spiritual refusal, no, a bodily refusal to believe I'm not at the right work now in the right way.

The knowingness in the bones. The certainty that each word is packed up with living perfect intention, whatever happens. The refusal to believe that if one is gifted, eventually the mere trick of saying will be learned.

One is crushed by the worlds & words of the masters. One survives. One hands over his small satchel of half-original pulses to learn how to be crushed.

One learns & one knows & hereon there is the junked wrath of alienation. Watching those left behind huddle, assure, nestle, bicker, couple—leaving them little notes like "They say Renoir painted with his penis" & "Hemingway tried to walk into live propeller blades when he thought he couldn't write anymore" & "Hawthorne filled his notebooks with anguished gibberish while his three new novels went unfinished" & "Feeling he could not write decently anymore in his native German, Rilke turned to French."

No. Type on the keyboard, press the save button, execute the "print one copy" command. Or hold down the backspace key or cut & eradicate—

"Why aren't you fighting back?" demands Rebecca.

"You're right. This sucks."

"Tell the truth. Write something good."

"I'm sick, I've been sick for days & pages."

"Is that all?"

"The mediocres own the castle. Their friendly, pathetic flag welcomes all. Writers' Workshop at 4. Wine & cheese at 8."

"That's not your castle."

"Mine is fallen. Mine rests on the edge of the ocean & disintegrates easefully every day."

"But it's been elsewhere, Ray. To Haight-Ashbury. To Michigan Avenue. To Woodstock. To Cornish, New Hampshire. Even to your bedeviling ZombieTown."

"I don't know how anymore. I'm sick."

Tick. Tick. Tick.

"I don't know anymore. I'm sick."

Tick. Tick. Tick.

"I don't know anymore. I'm sick."

Sick. Sick. Sick.

"I don't blow anymore. I'm brick. I don't snow anymore. I'm flick. I don't grow anymore. I'm crick. I don't sew anymore. I'm

Q: Who are You?
A: I really want to know.

Motherfucker, if you're gonna lose it, do it on the page. If they're gonna get you, make sure you're filling that last page & all the previous ones are burning self-immolation lovely around you—

Q: Who are you?
A: I don't know.

The world burns to the ground every fucking day. Hearts, bones, hopes. Plastic builds up, blood cools. Who are you? If you're going to go, brother, make them have to tear the burnt sheets off your burnt body.

But I'm click. I mean, wick. No, wicked. No, who?

Be. Be, motherfucker! It's all the bastards haven't taken—all they've ever really wanted—& no grandness when you relinquish it. Another on the pile. Pile 3-A-A-43-B, Level 1,000,371, Quadrant Z-Z-Z.

They can't throw you on the pile if you're on fire.

Brother, live for the torch. Have it in hand, write your every word with it. They'll circle you. They'll wait. But it's what you've got.

Or just hit their wall hard enough to leave a mess.

Art. Nice Art. Group. Smiles. Corrected manuscripts. Struggle. Synthesis. Cacophony of feelings to be righted. We may not all agree but each of us will have a say & each of us will get a turn.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

Come on, join the party,
dress yourself to kill—
party, blindness, book awards, small pieces placed in regional journals
(masturbate by day & night)

party, neat pages of punctuated clean sentiments, anger familiar, joy lightly epiphonic

(spell nice cunt with 3 C's)

Tick. Tick. Tick.

It's a good party, on a good boat, in a good harbor, we've a six-pack of Amstel Light amongst the five of us—who's gonna get crazy tonight?

(Watch out! Amante's just
climbed onto the boat, nude
but for the full wineskin he
wears around his clavicle!)

Calm down. Oh, calm down. Turn on the computer. Relax. Hey! It's dusty! Here's a dustfree cloth.

Where's your folder of poems? There you go—open them up

(she walked by starshine
skin poem hungry
open her up)

We'll print them up—we'll go to the coffeehouse & talk about them—don't worry—we'll get your portfolio together—who's your advisor? Who's on your committee?

(can I have corpses on my
committee? Whitman, his mouth
full of grass, nipple, semen
Rilke, his countess sucking his
pen up to full throttle
Dickinson, badgirl wanting to
fuck Godd, wanting to throb
with Death while young, while
able to Flesh Made Word
Flesh Made Word
Flesh Made Word
Flesh Made Word

I can see for miles & miles
& miles & miles & miles)

"What does this mean? Why do you use words like this? What's this one called?

YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE A TITLE!

(What does? What does? Ith thy listening o lord, no-lord, near-lord, Divers-o-Lord?

I think Soulard does drugs. Look at how he writes! He's stubborn, too! Thinks he's a genius!

(Hey baby, sit on a genius's lap?)

"You said tell the truth, Beckah."
"It's about time you did."
"But it's the same old shit! Freak-gone-acidhead-gone-bigger-Freak-writing!"
"Your story's halfway done & you're paying attention again."
"Now what?"
"Yes."

And he speaks from elsewhere: "I died last year, 1997. I'd turned 50 & that seemed enough for one life. But I promised Rich Americus that he'd know my story & I would like to return long enough to tell it to him."

The denizens of Luna T's look wondering at the TV, the radio, the jukebox.

Rebecca doesn't. She nods. "But my dad's not here."

I offer to write it down word for word.

Even returned, David Time is barely visible. His voice is clear, though.

"I was born in 1947 near Boston. Until the age of 20, I hadn't travelled, hadn't turned on, hadn't kissed a girl.

"Then I decided to take the bus to San Francisco. I was at college in Boston but I lived at home still. No friends, really. I had a job cleaning my old high school. In the summer of 1967 I decided I had to go out there & see if they really were building Paradise in San Francisco.

"I told my parents in a note they got after I left. They told me later they thought I was gone for good, especially after they saw some TV show on the 'hippie menace.' I'm sorry I hurt them. Back then, I wasn't really thinking too much about it."

"How do you pack for Paradise? I brought shirts, jeans, socks, underwear, my high school jacket. I had made a sort of portable tape-player & I put all my Beatles, Dylan, & Byrds tapes in my bag. I brought some pens & my book of my poems & a blank book for new ones. I brought my Allen Ginsberg & Whitman."

There is a pause.

Then: "I was to lose or pawn most of these things within weeks. It didn't matter for awhile."

A longer pause. Then: "I had never really been alone. I never was poor. I didn't know how little identity I was starting with.

"I was a shaggy product of the mass-produced quasi-counterculture. If I hadn't gotten on that bus, I would have stayed that way, waiting for Timothy Leary or The Beatles or *Rolling Stone* to tell me which thing to endorse this week & which thing to protest. This wasn't their purpose but they were my leaders, our leaders. Most of us still wanted to huddle with others, find approval. We wanted to be

praised without doing too much. My father is a good cook. Boston is a pretty place to hang around. The Viet Nam War is as horrible as it is close to one's front door.

"I thought Paradise would be like Boston only cleaner, & no Urban Renewal. Maybe I would meet a pretty hippie girl & we would smoke a stick of grass.

"I did meet a pretty hippie girl. Ellen Sturgis. Right at the Greyhound bus station, me with my long hair & all my things in my dad's Army bag.

"For the first hours of our meeting, I was in a young man's heaven. She was wearing a tie-dye dress, home-made, & no brassiere. She had long blonde hair with a purple scarf twisted into it. When I told her I was a poet, I saw a look I'd never seen before in a girl: I had something she had to know. I thought she was mine forever."

"How long have you been writing poetry?"

"Since high school."

"Will you read me one on the bus?"

"I guess so."

"How late is it? Wasn't it supposed to be here at 9?"

The bus came at noon. We sat in the back seat, a three seat row to ourselves. We took up two to start, then 1 1/2, then 1. I kept meaning to ask her if she was going to San Francisco, too, but never did.

"Will you do some Owsley crimson with me?"

"I don't think we should smoke on the bus. Maybe a reststop."

She laughed & touched me at the same time. I held back. I was so ready but I didn't know what to do.

I was scared but she said it was the best. We were hours into the ride, twisting roads through Pennsylvania hills when she convinced me.

"Would you like to kiss me?"

"Yes."

"And we'll do the Owsley?"

I nodded & she began arranging us inside a nest.

I think we did the acid first but I don't remember. I don't think I cared. I just wanted to kiss her. Well, we did more. Beneath blankets and such, she'd pulled her dress down to her ankles & she pulled me among her.

Davey groped & groaned. She kissed him throatdeep suddenly & then said, "Keep hushed or you'll have to share me." He obeyed & she availed herself to his touch. Her breasts were soft but her nipples so hard to his touch he didn't know what to do. She touched his mouth, smiled, turned her eyes down. He lapped each nipple softly til she advised again.

Hardly could he touch her buttocks though this nicely delayed the inevitable. They had groped into the evening & still he held back.

"Do it," she urged. "Touch me down there. But gently. See how I react. Feel with your fingertips. Watch my face."

There is a long pause. Mr. Bob is besieged with drink orders.

"The acid hit me then, just as my hand was starting to grope around her pubic hair. And before it had gone much further, the driver came back, suddenly, stealthily, caught her half-naked & me looking out of my mind."

"We didn't get thrown off. I think Ellen said something to make friends & it was the right thing. I think he said, 'Get dressed. And make sure he doesn't do anything crazy.'

"I think. I'm not really sure. I think before she left me, probably in Chicago, she laid me out, undid my jeans & we did something. I don't know if we were head to torso or torso to torso. I don't know how it was.

"I know that I tripped most of the way to San Francisco & she was long gone when I got there. She left me with two souvenirs, tho.

"One was her purple scarf. She put it deep in my bag so I wouldn't lose it while tripping.

"Th'other was a message she wrote with my pen just above my crotch. 'Davey the Poet—You're beautiful. I had you first. But the next girl will stay longer. Peace. E.S.'

"Now I didn't know all this while on the bus. The fact was that the driver who yelled at us was Death Himself & stole my blonde Ellen away. I tried to explain to her that I would find her. I figured she was an illusion, inspiring me, & I'd tumble into my own mind through tunnels & vortices, into mountains to find her. I probably didn't say much so she didn't know why I was so upset.

"At one point there were mountains outside the bus & I locked into them & they became a rainstorm where my plan to reassemble her was challenged & there was a desert & I was bringing her back to me. But something went wrong. I was back on the bus & I'd been sleeping for a few hours & there was no Ellen & there was a new driver & I had no proof that she was real & I was in Nevada still many hours away. I felt half-dead & I didn't think I could ever go home to my parents again."

David Time's voice is silent & pretty soon we figure out that we will have to wait for more. The next evening at a strangely hushed moment in the night, he resumes his story.

"The bus pulled into San Francisco on a bright summer afternoon & I was surprised to see so many fantastic hills & so many people wearing suits! Palm trees were strange to me but made a lot more sense than businessmen. And the traffic was like Boston's!

"There were hippies, too. but I could tell they weren't really in charge. But I was excited & felt like it was a miracle after all that I had made it OK.

"And I got lost so quickly it was amazing. I don't remember anymore where the bus station was, but I took wrong turns from the moment I left it.

"Feeling like a fool or, worse, like my father who hates to walk even in a small city like Boston, I got a cab. But when I said in a tiny shy voice 'Haight Street' he started yelling about how big it was. 'It's all hippies & freaks & tourists down there nowadays.' 'Yes,' I said. 'What?' 'Bring me to the hippies.' He was so mad he

wouldn't talk to me again. He even forgot that he was delighted to find out I was from Boston like him. He'd asked me that before asking me where I was going."

We all wait patiently at the bar for David to resume. His voice is ruddy & low but clear to every listener. Strange, to some other establishment perhaps, to enjoy one's evening's entertainment in the form of a dead poet's biography at a tavern.

"The goddpink is protecting all of this," Rebecca confides to me. I nod, as grateful to her as to it.

David resumes. "Being at the Haight in '67 made me wish I had come in '66. It was already starting to devour itself, by selling trinkets to attract tourists & by allowing the encroaching predators an unnamed percentage of the young kids that flocked to it every day. Protection & a sense of being in on things depended largely on how long you'd been a resident. Most the the runaway teenage girls didn't stand a chance. Overnight, it seemed, they went from paisley suburban hippie princesses to junkie whores. I saw it happen. I was 20 years old, from an East Coast city, & while I came thinking that here the pricetags had gotten burned, I saw too many messed up girls with dead eyes, younger than me, to ignore. I knew I couldn't help all of them. The youth in me, maybe brazenly, secretly planned to help one though.

"But the days were also golden & sometimes people did smile at the sun. There was a charity place giving out food & clothes, & people gathered in Golden Gate Park to try & break free of their fears & their greed.

"My father had been in Europe when he was young & he told me that hostels & boardinghouses were the ideal way to travel on a low budget. I was lucky: I found a sort of commune on Haight Street, one of those huge houses with endless numbers of rooms. I had a little room with a mattress & a huge red candle. Of course, my stuff became common property, my books & tape-player & tapes. I kept my own book of poems tho with me all the time. Some people resented this."

"How was it set up?" I suddenly ask, quicker than I can wonder if I should interrupt him.

David is silent. "Not very well. A big house can fill with lots of trash. It's hard to clean. People come & go. Some are zooming all the time.

"You end up with more territorialism than you'd ever dream. The men are liberated up to their neighbors' freely wanting their women & their drugs. The women maneuver among the various powers. They become whores, for protection, for food, for prestige."

"What worked?"

"I learned that you have to assess your living place from every angle. And you have to question every member for motivation. Sometimes pussy & grass are all someone wants. Sometimes it's power or fanaticism. You have to decide what you want to accomplish & assemble your group accordingly."

"I betchyou got some nice snatch. I mean, drug-taking hippy girls" laughs one of the grizzles.

"Not inside the commune. And not like Ellen Sturgis again. I kept it casual. I'd be writing my poems in Golden Gate Park & sometimes a girl would come along."

"Were you afraid because of the acid & the bus ride?" Rebecca asks.

Silence. Then: "No. Ellen hadn't hurt me. She had pressed her warm shoulders to me & urged me to explore & understand her. She didn't know the acid would insist that I lose her. I missed her. I thought of her breasts & hips & I wished I could remember more details. In dreams I made love to her all night. I kept her. It was all like a warning. Noone is free with others. She knew our tryst would end at Chicago. This protected her. The girls I met in the park tried very hard to be free but their bodies were telling them elsewise.

"So I was careful. I held back."

"Do you wish you hadn't?" asks someone.

"Yes. But there was one girl, in red dress with white polka dots, a brunette—"

The grizzles guffaw and remark.

"She played guitar & she read *Walden*."

The bar gathers closer. They like David; even the grizzles do.

"She laughed a lot & she moved like water. She borrowed her friend's jeep & we went out to the desert & had a peyote initiation. I was initiated. Into her. Into us."

"Call me Eve tonight."

"Why?"

"Because the peyote is like rebirth & I am the first woman you'll be with."

"I remember all of that night, the dragons & saints & nine-starred monsters I witnessed. I hung inside her for a long time until we learned each other's rhythms & came together. We destroyed our tent & nearly burned up in our campfire.

"She drove me back to the city late the next day. We didn't talk. I remember my hand played inside her red dress & she squirmed but she manipulated my hand to ride its sensations, not bring them to climax.

"She dropped me off at my commune's door & I knew she was gone right then.

"But I thought that a part of her wasn't sure. A part of her saw how I saw her, how even when the peyote visions were horrible, I thought of her first. I never told her about Ellen but Ellen was on my mind.

"I could have kept her. But you know what I did?"

Silence.

"I decided I had to leave the commune. I decided I had to wander homeless like the Chinese poet Li Po that I'd been reading about in the library.

"That night, I packed my dad's Army bag & walked out. The living room chandelier was decorated with tie-dye underwear, someone was carefully carving a brick of hashish at a table. A sleeping bag near the front door showed me a girl's head eyes closed in ecstasy, as a bumpy form between her thighs paid its tribute.

Someone put on a Jimi Hendrix album but nobody saw me go. I checked into a more old-fashioned boarding house a few blocks away & slept that night on a neatly-made bed. I figured I wouldn't have one again for awhile."

"What about the girl?" asks Rebecca.

"I thought I saw her later on at a show at the Fillmore." He says no more.

That night, Rebecca & I sit in her living room, nude, entwined, but pensive.

"Is it right?" she asks me.

"How?"

"I'm getting doubtful, like you."

"Rebecca, there is no choice here. We have to do this. Perhaps we'll be more certain later on."

She trusts me but she isn't satisfied. "Ray, what do you think of this story?"

I squirm among her bones. She steadies me with one hand on the back of my head, one on my crotch, her tongue poking lustily into my ear. "You're mine" she whispers huskily. "Talk to me."

I relax. "It's true. It's necessary. But it's still unfolding. You've never seen one of these stories so, ah, close up. They get difficult, more difficult, easy for a moment, I fight them again & again. It's never easy."

She's listening closely, stroking me here & there, gauging my words one at a time. "And do you like this one like the others?"

I disentangle, & stand, & begin to pace, & to talk. "It's a long march, so far, with small battles that amount to only so much. We're not there yet."

"But you can't take that march lightly!"

"No! Of course not! It's got to accelerate cleanly. My mind has to be clear for what's to come. Every word matters."

She captures my pacing & I elect to carry her. She is light & warm & swishy. We slowly dampen each other, heat each other up, prepare each other for our private feast.

She kisses me furiously & begins to shake in my arms. I try to toss her on the couch but she pulls me along by my long hair. My illicit lover is hungry.

The next night, David resumes his story. "I needed to leave the Haight. I remember walking a lot one day, looking for something. The Tenderloin was too tragic, noone could be a man there writing poetry about longhaired junkie kids wearing crosses & unflinching when someone would inspect their genitals. I even went into Berkeley for a couple of hours but there were only the clean-eared radicals marching around with their professor-lovers.

"I ended up on North Beach which hasn't had any water in a century. I went into City Lights Bookstore & there were some people I knew slightly. I told them I was going homeless like Li Po & I was going to write a lot of poetry & they told me I could use their rooves. Let's see. . . there were three of them, one couple, so two rooves to start with. There were more later. I didn't think it was legal so I was paranoid & on the move."

"Sir, your tale is extraordinary but you allow yourself the expounding of few details," Dr. Emerson remarks. There are many protests to this but David agrees.

"Until now, it's hardly a story at all. I don't have much time left—I want to use it to tell you about Suzann Valentin."

There is silent waiting.

"I had been living this way for awhile, weeks, maybe, when someone brought me to a party to read my poems. I didn't want to but all my, ah, roof-patrons would be there.

"I'd been clean & dry for a long time & my poetry showed this. It was tight, lucid, but clean & dry. But everyone like it. Most of the poets around weren't much but smiling sex jackals—the ones with talent played guitar. So I was the best of an empty field.

"Except Suzann didn't think so." There is a long pause. "She was like Ellen & Eve but she was more. We argued that night from the party's couch all the way to her bed.

"She had long red hair—

"Figures" sez Rebecca with a sharp look at me. I shrug.

"and she made no excuses about sex. No safety nets. She told me my poetry was hollow & she'd be the one to help me fill it in. Her body was healthy & hot. So were her paintings. She was fearless & tried to teach me to be fearless.

"'You'll be happy when we can't beat each other anymore,' she said. 'We have to work toward stalemate & truce.'

"She gave my poems insides & then she would paint my words into her canvases. They were all that hung in her apartment—except one Picasso."

"Which one?" Rebecca asks.

"The mother & child on the seashore with the boat & the rose."

Rebecca nods, pleased.

"I began writing poems about her body & these disturbed her. They were romantic but harsh. We'd reached our stalemate."

"Did you love her?" Rebecca asks.

"We loved each other but it was among a lot of other things. Our sex got violent like the penis & vagina can never reach a stalemate. We flooded each other's art until that got destructive too. There were a lot of drugs. We wore down but wouldn't leave each other for even a day. Until she left for good, to the art school at the Art Institute of Chicago."

Another silence. "David, I've written all this down but I don't know what your main point is. What do you want him to know?"

"That's up to him."

"Are you done?"

"No. You see, I went home then, almost a month late for classes. But I went back the next year, to Chicago, looking for her."

"Was she there?" asks Rebecca, squeezing my hand.

"I went the week of the Chicago riots. I didn't research any of it, just got on the bus to Chicago & began looking.

"But I didn't look very well. There were so many kids in the city, so many girls. I thought I'd find her in the Museum. I even asked a guard about her.

"It's a beautiful place. I knew Suzann loved Georgia O'Keeffe so I found her pictures & waited. I went four times in a week while the police & the kids fought."

Silence ends the evening's chapter.

"I don't know what Americus will do with this," I say to Rebecca that night.

She shakes her head. "It's his kind of story exactly. It's sad. It's about loss. Especially if he can't keep Franny" she adds softly.

"I couldn't let go even then. I went to Woodstock to look for her the next summer." He laughs vaguely. "It was because of her that I started that commune in Cornish. I had nothing else to do really & my poetry needed me. So I built it a special place. Then I left it too."

"But I don't understand" sez Rebecca. "You could have found her if you'd looked harder!"

Dave resumes w/o response to her comment. "I remember being in Woodstock & how hard it was for people to be free. We were dirty & the drugs made some of us paranoid & the music was sometimes upsetting. Some people wanted to stay put, never go back & some wanted to bring the revolution back home. I picked up a girlfriend along the way but she was cold & scared & so I rocked her to sleep & brought her to the medical tent when I could."

"Why not take some first? Drugged out little hippy girl would never know!" bellows a drunken grizzle.

"Jimi Hendrix played the 'National Anthem' at dawn Sunday morning & as I listened I knew it was over. Suzann was gone. The Dream was collapsing. I decided to return to Boston to finish my schooling."

"Hey, Hendrix is great!" someone yells.

"He was too good. Everything was too good. We couldn't maintain it. Life has to even out. Raymond, you asked me what I wanted Rich to know from me about all of this. Tell him that he can go as he's going but eventually he'll hit the ditch again. Tell him that eventually he'll fall down & stay down. Tell him that the harder he falls, the less he'll have left even to crawl. Tell him I lived for 22 years & died for 28. Tell him he's lucky to be 38 & still going."

Pause. A general moving-around but there's more. "Tell him it's better to aim for the sun no matter what life around him argues. Tell him to aim for the heart of the sun."

v.

Something hippy this way comes. Luna T's bandroom, the one with no regular band, became in the summer of '98 a regular hangout to a crowd of kids late teens/early 20s because Rebecca slowly drew them in. She had Dyllan Wey escalate the stereo sound system, which he did with dark glee, then she found here & there around the city enough Grateful Dead, Phish, & Noisy Children bootlegs to impress the corest fan.

A light system followed, built to match the psychedelic dancing colors of at least '68. There were black lights for glow in the dark effects on one's skin & clothes—and since "Freedom Nights," as they were called, boasted no alcohol, the 2 a.m. liquor law did not apply. Rebecca even opened up the back entrance so there was no need for commerce with the bar.

She brought juice vending machines that dispensed 20 oz. of bottled energy for $1 a piece. Admission was $2—no profit ballooned but Mr. Bob said the joint's books didn't look quite so emaciated.

"Freedom Nights" grew slowly. Rebecca made me into resident Artist & Bouncer for kids who lit up joints or showed up pounded on booze, pills, acid. Many was the 7-D talk I had with young tripping Billy or Molly—finally, Rebecca spread the word: the cops would bust the place if it didn't police itself. I smoked many an heroic joint w/the regulars to convince them that we meant Freedom but we meant no drug busts. They liked my poetry & I'm big so they listened.

"Rebecca, what about when Noisy Children comes back?"

"The kids want that. They'll be glad."

"And yr dad?"

"He trusts me, Ray. He taught me about all of this from when I was a kid. It's a present for him."

Her voice twinged just a bit. "I want him back here. I want to sit with him & you & Franny & the rest. His favorite, Dr. Emerson, is here!"

I didn't usually dance on Freedom Night but that night, tonight really, I dressed in black shirt & jeans, brushed up my ragged old self, & took my sweetheart into that paisley crowd.

The music was from an old Noisy Children concert, Americus opening up a series of early Beatles songs to psychedelic jams. Missing Franny & her father, riven suddenly, rarely, by insecurity, Rebecca hung onto my arms—until I picked up her light body & threw her toward the stage—where she was caught by Noisy Children spiritus—and she could see her father—and climb inside his music to be with him—

"When does this end, Dad? When do you come home to me?"

"Rebecca, have I ever let you down?"

Some kind of loud wind made talking harder.

"I can't keep doing what I'm doing without you."

"You have Ray."

"I need you. He has his own world to fight. He helps me when he can."

"Like now?"

"Dad, are you going to get Franny?"

"Yes."

"Can she stay?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. Not even Soulard."

Rebecca returns to me in a hurled heap, out of breath.

"It's no good for me to see him," she says. "He won't tell me anything about what he's doing or when he's coming back."

"I'm sorry. You just seem kind of lost without him."

She dances grim-faced in my arms. "You're right. But I can't be like this forever. I told you he trusts me but I'm not acting like I trust him much."

She talks on, & eventually decides to continue her plans for Luna T's—*and* to assume Americus will be home sooner or later and that Noisy Children will return too.

Her plans are many. "Freedom Nights" happen twice weekly on Friday & Saturday nights.

She begins to renovate the bandroom. Her pictures fill its several walls, along with a long fishtank & a new bookcase. The ceiling we paint black & cover with fluorescent stars, moons & planets.

But she wants more.

"I'm looking for us to cross the line. We can influence the people that come in here. It can be a kind of home—"

"Like a commune?" I grin.

"Sort of. But we need to make money anyway so why not something like that? People need a home. But I see them hang around Berlin Before the Fall & it's stupid! Talk talk talk. Food. Coffee."

She tries to make me agree to teach literature classes but I balk.

"It's not school! It's a bar & restaurant!"

"But I'll get people to come! They like me. I'll tell them how much you know!"

I grab her hands & she tries to kick me but I growl at her to stop. She stops but looks angry.

"Rebecca, you're not thinking. You want to make this into a college. You can't do it. If you want to tell everyone that Thursday is poetry night or if you want to ask Dr. Emerson to lecture, fine. But the learning will have to be packaged inside the promise of delight."

She listens. My grip relaxes. "Are you going to help me make this work or just criticize?"

"You know I'll help."

When I agree to run New Art Night, she softens. "You know," she sez with the last of her heat, "my Dad would let me do whatever I want."

"I'm harder than that. Besides, he'll only blame me if we're not successful. And you'll be mad I didn't speak up."

She smiles & nearly says "No, I wouldn't" but doesn't & that's fine.

"New Art Night" goes well with its readings & music. The following is a chronicle of one of its July '98 nights, offered up for the record as a tribute to Rebecca Americus's dream of something more.

We're sitting in her manager's office early in the evening, arguing.

"Rebecca, this is your design. You're the only one for the host."

"But I've never done it & you have! Why do you fight my ideas." She's upset, her face is teary but I'm little moved.

I don't grab her this time. I offer my arms, meekly, & she creeps suspiciously within my grasp.

"Rebecca, your last name is Americus. That's the name that best represents this place. People will learn that you're as important as Rich is to the scene around here. What could be more right? And how could you be prouder?"

She softly hugs me. She knows I'm right. "I keep thinking you're against all this," she mumbles.

Now I hug her tightly. "Reb, this isn't my world. You know that. I can't ever forget this."

"Are you leaving?"

"No. But I have to not deny the truth."

OK, so she's host at New Art Night. She's picked about a half-dozen artists to perform. She makes me go first.

Reading parts of this very story to the smoky half-filled room is sweet. They love the David Time-in-San Francisco sequence.

"Hey, man, how did you know all that stuff about the '60s?"

"I read a lot of books."

"Man! I wish I could go out there right now! But it wouldn't be the same."

"Nothing is."

Jim Reality III plays a long set of Beatles & Who songs. The hippy kids know him well by now & shout & dance to his music. Some throw joints at his feet in appreciation. He sweeps them right up. "For the stockpile," he explains to me, grinning.

A young football player friend of mine reads some poetry, half in the bag from the bottle of Jameson's Irish whiskey he'd been sipping. He's well-liked, too, & he reads a lot of poetry:

Jersey diner 4 am
never tired 4 am
we grind our young dreams
& sprinkle them on our pancakes
then we smoke our fantasies
& open up our throttles
The Turnpike is an easy language,
tonight, crusty with flames &

shadows; one buddy says:
'let's spook the troopers!' another says:
'let's find those girls!' but
we near home with our usual
empty hands & disappoint our stars
again.

The crowd is now riled & that's when Rebecca invites the young band amongst the kids to play—they're all guitarists so "I guess we'll have to give Cecile Grey some work!"

It's a great moment because til this night even Cecile wasn't around. Doubtful about the new scene at T's, he's stayed in his room at the YMCA playing drums & drinking hard.

The band has no name & they haven't written any songs they want to perform so Cecile amicably backs them up on a run of Beatles, Grateful Dead & Eagles songs. He first tells Rebecca that bleedin' hippy music isn't his thing but she just says "You never say no to my dad if he keeps your pitchers full," he agrees & terms are negotiated.

The crowd is now dancing around, many are clearly stoned, but the music is too bright to ignore.

After about an hour Rebecca signals the band to wrap up. They loose all they have left & gather a great applause.

The crowd settles down, waiting, briefly patient while Rebecca bustles around on stage.

"More music!"

"More poetry!"

She steps to the microphone & says, "No."

The crowd grumbles, amicably, still well-petted, still trusting.

"My friend Dr. Emerson is going to give a talk. If you're hip to anything tonight, you'll listen closely."

Dr. Emerson comes forward, tall & thin, brownhaired & bearded, dressed in a suit. Challenged by Rebecca, the crowd stills & waits.

He speaks, amicably, clearly, musically. "Back in my time, we had events called 'Conversations.' My friend Margaret Fuller hosted many of these up in Boston for the leading lady thinkers of the day."

A few girls whoop.

"When young Rebecca asked me to speak tonight, the idea struck me that a conversation would be an inspiring means to break ourselves through—"

"to the other side?" some crank yelps.

"No. To break ourselves through to ourselves. To delight in all that we are right here & now. To realize that this is enough, being here together, & invisible worlds await our conquering touch. Worlds *inside* of us."

The crowd shifts some more. To go from rock-n-roll to Platonic dialogue is wrenching. Still, they wait & listen.

vi.

"I wrote something a long time ago that I'd like to paraphrase to you now. We have become a society of pathetic whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of death, afraid of fortune, & afraid of each other. Our age yields no great & perfect persons."

"Nothing's changed since your time," someone quips to a general laugh.

Dr. Emerson smiles briefly. "No. That's what I've concluded during my visit. The world still wants for strong, honest leaders."

"Unless they turn out to be Hitler" someone says.

"Or else they get shot down" sez a woman in the crowd.

"This is all true," remarks Dr. Emerson. "My day saw Lincoln fall. You've had Kennedy & King. In between our times was Ghandi."

The crowd coheres a little, waits.

"But what about the leaders in this room?" he goes on. "I see the brightest young faces, born of the many ethnicities, seated before me, polite because I am speaking, polite, certainly" he trails off. "Too polite!" he suddenly cries. "Waiting to follow the next good leader, knowing that hesitating would amount to crime. Why wait you?" he cries, swinging a pointing finger around the crowd, then dropping into silence.

"Politics blows, man," a young fellow says & many agree loudly.

Dr. Emerson leans forward toward the young man. "Did I say politics?"

"No, man, but we were talking about good presidents & all."

Emerson steps back. "No, we were talking about leaders. Few elected persons lead or even intend to do so when campaigning. They promise & cajole, hang their unsavory tongues out, but at best what they do is represent some of their constituency some of the time."

The crowd is restless again, the air of history class distasteful.

"What's yr point, man?" persists the boy who disdains politics.

"None of us in this room, unless I am gravely mistaken, is pressing forth with his or her own personal revolution. We instead contrive for titillation in obscure but defended regions of our own nests."

"Your pal Thoreau wasn't like that," another girl remarks.

Smile. "No. Henry was good bastard enough to press forward." Some in the audience gasp a bit at this. Emerson pounces on this.

"Will any less do? No, in thunder! There is no easy path. We have stomachs & feet & need shelter & food. We need emotional security. We need to ponder our adventures, at times, from the sleepy safety of the hearth. If artists, as many

here are, we need to be taken in, babied, whilst our muse coyly or brazenly eludes us."

"What's the plan, then?" someone asks.

"Stop waiting for Dame Fortune to wend your way! Look inside of yourself & ponder what you discover! How much is left after society's passing clowns & your dread history are removed from consideration? How alone with your thoughts can you become if you do not think about known or famous persons? How much of your happiness depends upon the continued or hoped-for affections of others?"

Dr. Emerson steps back, a little sweated, gauging what he's accomplished.

I decide to press him. "How do you find American society a century after your own time?"

"Thicker," he says immediately. "But no deeper. The chiefly valued freedom, then as always, is the freedom from worry. A greater portion of the land seems to achieve this these days but there their strivings desist. The American love of contraptions goes on, as does its general love of novelty." Here he stops. Seizing for his audience again, he cries, "but how many of you have been struck windless by any novelty lately?" This rouses quite a few who gripe & complain.

"No," says the first girl who had spoken. "The Internet is new. Probably everyone here has a computer & most people get email & websites sooner or later."

The crowd turns back eagerly to Dr. Emerson. He begins slowly. "At first I was confounded by all that. I marveled at its speed & variety."

"Lotta good porn," someone cracks. "All kinds, too."

"I found something amiss as I studied it further," continues Dr. Emerson. "What it was, at first, I felt I lacked sufficient knowledge to uncover." He pauses. "Now I have a better answer. The virtual breaching of time & space has, by its means, produced mediocre miracles. The urgent fact of corporeal mortality & spatial reality has been reduced to developing swifter machinery. We edge, in an illusory manner, closer to one another whilst continuing to drift further away from Nature, from Godd & from the truly miraculous firestorm that boils in each of our souls.

"Science provides most of its answers by knitting an additional loop into its current fabric. Technology grows broader but no deeper. Power dulls the mass of persons with its ever-increasing but artificial starshine."

This speech receives approval.

A new young fellow speaks up. "Sir, could you advise us how to be leaders? Believe it or not, some of us think about these things a lot but we just don't know. The older people have the power & the money. Some of us still live at home. I mean, I dig where you're coming from but I'd like something, um, specific."

"Are there public lands near your home, Son?"

"Yah, sure, I guess."

"Find them. Visit them often. After a few weeks bring a book to some shady place & read it. Is it true in this place you've come to love? Bring a friend some

time after that & sound his views. Do they stand as soundly as when you heard them propounded in the coffeehouse or tavern?

"Test yourself. Consider your personal history & what of it embarrasses you with the trees & the grasses looking in. Consider your life. What portions of it would you rather the maples & the Black-eyed Susans didn't know?

"Consider, in this now-cherished place, what manner of Godd would lease to you perfect moments such as these. Consider your soul. Are you proud, blooming thing enough to be planted between nearby boulder & stream?"

He stops here. The audience is his. They like him—an agreeing affection passes from heart to heart.

"I am glad to be among you & grateful that you have talked with me. I come from a family of preachers & we crave the place at head of the congregation.

"But my Aunt Mary Moody Emerson imbued me with a deeper yearning—to preach the congregation right out the door.

"I've urged you into Nature because I believe humanity can derive many healthy lessons from its example but also because we stand evermore as witless, destructive monarchs unconsciously presiding over the annihilation of our kingdom. Each destructive act is like a perverse prayer, crushing the good vessels of our souls, diluting our embrace of the Godd within us & without."

Sensing the Doctor is finished, Rebecca inaugurates applause for him while hurrying up to shake his hand.

The applause does not cease. Dr. Emerson is quickly surrounded by young people each with a private question or opinion.

I kiss Rebecca quickly on her cheek & elude her snatch at me to stay. I'm done. I'm thirsty. She might kick me later but I'm simply edified enough.

So strange & wonderful to push open the heavy wooden door to the barroom & be greeted with shouts for beer & arguments over the Red Sox & Patriots.

"The Patriots will go nowhere without Curtis Martin & Sam Gash!"

"Hey Soulard we'd like to meet some of your young friends! Are you the only one that gets fresh pussy?"

"I guess so," I snap back, impatient for Mr. Bob to draw me my two pints of Guinness.

"Bledsoe will have to throw 60-70 times a game!"

"Who cares about him? What about the Red Sox? They're fighting for their lives out there!"

"Maybe the Yankees will just forfeit!"

"That's a start!" The laughter thickens & the talk jangles on.

Later, I sit with Rebecca & Dr. Emerson, after Rebecca kicked me & I had to carry her into her office for some, ah, strong scolding.

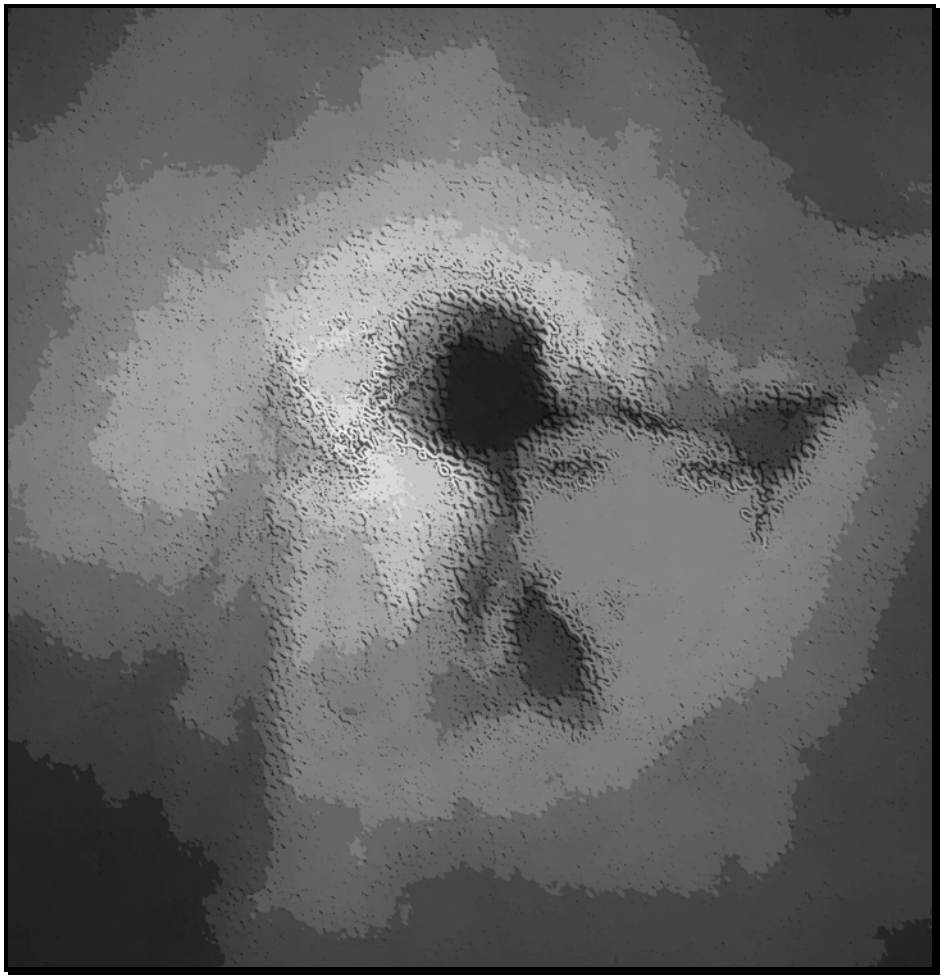
"You did OK, Doc," I say, drunken, bleary, kicked, wanting to scold Rebecca some more.

He's drunk some too, well-made screwdrivers. "For a moment, they look inside & see all their vastness. Then they have their turn with me & want me to tell them what to do." He's down.

Rebecca fends off my scolding hands & drapes on Emerson for a moment. She's not drunk but I did get her high. "You were just great. My dad would have been so proud."

Rebecca sleeps smiling in my arms. I hold her without pretending to understand my fortune. I sing into her dreams, simple words about love & friendship. She wakes briefly, sees me, is reassured, dozes again. Sees me, is reassured. I doze, too; & dream unimaginably happy, within my ruins.

[To be concluded in *Cenacle* / 49 / October 2003]



George W. Bush

G. W. Bush (Dubya)
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
www.bushoccupation.com

Selected References

- Enron
- Halliburton
- Harken
- Merrill Lynch
- Philip Morris
- MBNA America Bank
- Pfizer Inc
- AT&T
- Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Amgen, Inc
- Microsoft
- Dell Computers

Work Experience:

- Ran for Congress and lost.
- Bought an oil company, but couldn't find any oil in Texas, company went bankrupt shortly after he sold all of his stock.
- Bought the Texas Rangers baseball team in a sweetheart deal that took land using taxpayer money. Biggest move: Traded Sammy Sosa to the Chicago White Sox.
- With father's help (and his name) was elected Governor of Texas.

Accomplishments in previous positions:

- Changed pollution laws for power and oil companies and made Texas the most polluted state in the Union.
- Replaced Los Angeles with Houston as the most smog-ridden city in America. Cut taxes and bankrupted the Texas government to the tune of

billions in borrowed money.
- Set record for most executions by any Governor in American history.
- Became president after losing the popular vote by over 500,000 votes, with the help of his father's appointments to the Supreme Court.

Accomplishments as president:

- Attacked and took over two countries.
- Spent the surplus and bankrupted the treasury.
- Shattered record for biggest annual deficit in history.
- Set economic record for most private bankruptcies filed in any 12-month period.
- Set all-time record for biggest drop in the history of the stock market.
- First president in decades to execute a federal prisoner.
- First president in US history to enter office with a criminal record.
- After taking the entire month of August 2001 off for vacation, presided over the worst security failure in US history.
- Set the record for more campaign fund-raising trips than any other president in US history.
- In his first two years in office over 2 million Americans lost their jobs.
- Cut unemployment benefits for more out of work Americans than any president in US history.
- Set the all-time record for most foreclosures in a 12-month period.
- Appointed more convicted criminals to administration positions than any president in US history.
- Set the record for the fewest number of press conferences held by any president since the advent of television.
- Signed more laws and executive orders amending the Constitution than any president in US history.
- Presided over the biggest energy crises in US history and refused to intervene when corruption was revealed.
- Presided over the highest gasoline prices in US history and refused to use the national reserves as past presidents have.
- Cut healthcare benefits for war veterans.
- Set the all-time record for most people worldwide to simultaneously take to the streets to protest a single national leader (15 million people), shattering the record for protest against any person in the history of mankind.
- Dissolved more international treaties than any president in US history.
- Members of his cabinet are the richest of any administration in US history. (the "poorest" multi-millionaire, Condoleezza Rice has an Chevron oil tanker named after her).
- First president in US history to have all 50 states of the Union simultaneously go bankrupt.

- Presided over the biggest corporate stock market fraud of any market in any country in the history of the world.
- First president in US history to order a US attack and military occupation of a sovereign nation.
- Created the largest government department bureaucracy in the history of the United States.
- Set the all-time record for biggest annual budget spending increases, more than any president in US history.
- First president in US history to have the United Nations remove the US from the human rights commission and elections monitoring board.
- Withdrew from the World Court of Law.
- Refused to allow inspectors access to US prisoners of war and by default no longer abide by the Geneva Conventions.
- First president in US history to refuse United Nations election inspectors (during the 2002 US elections).
- All-time US (and world) record holder for most corporate campaign donations.
- His biggest lifetime campaign contributor presided over one of the largest corporate bankruptcy frauds in world history (Kenneth Lay, former CEO of Enron Corporation).
- Spent more money on polls and focus groups than any president in US history.
- First president in US history to unilaterally attack a sovereign nation against the will of the United Nations and the world community.
- First president to run and hide when the US came under attack (and then lied saying the enemy had the code to Air Force One).
- Took the biggest world sympathy for the US after 911 and, in less than a year, made the US the most resented country in the world (possibly the biggest diplomatic failure in US and world history).
- With a policy of "dis-engagement" created the most hostile Israeli-Palestine relations in at least 30 years.
- First US president in history to have a majority of the people of Europe (71%) view his presidency as the biggest threat to world peace and stability.
- First US president in history to have the people of South Korea more threatened by the US than their immediate neighbor, North Korea.
- Changed US policy to allow convicted criminals to be awarded government contracts.
- Set all-time record for number of administration appointees who violated US law by not selling huge investments in corporations bidding for government contracts.
- Failed to fulfill his pledge to get Osama Bin Laden "dead or alive."
- Failed to capture the anthrax killer who tried to murder the leaders of our country at the United States Capitol building. After 18 months he has no

leads and zero suspects.

- In the 18 months following the 911 attacks he has successfully prevented any public investigation into the biggest security failure in the history of the United States.
- Removed more freedoms and civil liberties for Americans than any other president in US history.
- In a little over two years created the most divided country in decades, possibly the most divided the US has ever been since the Civil War.
- Entered office with the strongest economy in US history and in less than two years turned every single economic category straight downward.

Records and References:

- At least one conviction for drunk driving in Maine (Texas driving record has been erased and is not available).
- AWOL from National Guard and deserted the military during a time of war.
- Refuse to take drug test or even answer any questions about drug use.
- All records of his tenure as governor of Texas have been spirited away to his father's library, sealed in secrecy and unavailable for public view.
- All records of any SEC investigations into his insider trading or bankrupt companies are sealed in secrecy and un-available for public view.
- All minutes of meetings for any public corporation he served on the board of are sealed in secrecy and unavailable for public view.
- Any records or minutes from meetings he (or his VP) attended regarding public energy policy are sealed in secrecy and unavailable for public review.

For personal references please speak to his daddy or uncle James Baker (They can be reached at their offices of the Carlyle Group for war-profiteering).

RAYMOND SOULARD, JR.

6 x 36 Nocturnes

[sixth series]

"The way things work
is that eventually
something catches."

—Jorie Graham, 1996.

i. For Lisa Marie

Beyond shine, beyond blue fancy,
my fingers touch yours, eyes on eyes,
lips on lips, a mile crushed, many,
marry me, marry me. Your teasing laugh.
Your kindness. Your ferocity. Your pain.

Nothing in this world exists. I love you.

******

ii. Thanksgiving (for Lisa Marie)

No music to share yet tonight, not
  tonight, no hook into its rumble,
no trail of ash unto its flame. Claws
  undrawn, rage in a box with no walls,
empty streets, ceasing trains. I love you,
  marry me. Marry me.

"Yes," you say. "Always."

The least thought matters, marry me,
  marry me. A choice, a truth. A magick.
A gleam, a way. A kitten in our bed

kneads your breast. I trace my hand on
your belly as you drift. You dream. You moan.
You seize me. I love you.

"Yes," you say. "Always."

Our prayer tonight a white butterfly,
returned to you from a forgotten star.
Now a candle, now a scent, now the song
we are learning to share. Your pink
gown is our hunger. My blue suit our embrace.
Marry me, marry me.

"Yes," you say. "Always."

******

iii. Adoration

Preach. Teach. Heal. Diminishing
to a road, a daisy.

Trust the instincts when pursuing tribe &
meat. Question otherwise, doubt,
laugh, scratch. Give more.

Preach, teach, heal. Elements of a book,
a song. Forget the words. *The tune matters.*

All is path. I will follow you. A coming day,
beyond following. All is path. Body clothed
in lace, beauty so, never forget her laugh.

Preach. Teach. Heal. A life insistent
at sucking, strewing. Scatters every night.

Raindrops. No names. Bliss. Thank you.
Days of work & love, too, laughter
on empty beaches. Chocolate.

Preach. Teach. Heal. Get a shower.
Put on your boots. Get to work.

******

iv. Autumn Passage (for Lisa Marie)

To play one true note, true as a leaf's cycle,
true as a full moon floating in a merry-clouded
sky, true as our child's songs of cookies &
teapots, & rowboat dreams, true as once &
forevermore, true, true, one true note, true
enough to linger on between living borders, among

giggling bones, witted dreams, to play one true
note undeniable to king & guru, a throb of
blood to disturb dry, wordy wars, one true note,
a moan, a mumble, to capture the words &
reinvent the world, one true note, several,
compose a thrumming kiss, wrap it in crimson,

bounce it to you by way of merry-clouded full
moon, true, true, one true note, play one
true note with me, love, we'll make a song,
become a door, an open door, our hands
to wage Beauty, our thighs to make noisy
maps unto healing, to play one true note

even when the raw empty arms of trees
are truest, when love seems more rupture
than gestation, to play, howl, & bleed one true
note til what we share bridges all we
have lost, to bright & bounce & realize we
are someone from somewhere, point through

the sky to some dot once our home. Whistle
if you love me. Sigh if you don't. I've been
waiting to love you all my life. Songs
of cookies & teapots. Rowboat dreams.
I saw my scripture burn to life at last as
you brushed your dark hair, true note, true note,

you are my true note in these daysless times
when I watch squirrels twitch & hop across

leafy streets, when I remember my life & wonder
what remains, something remains, a true note,
one true note, here is my pen & my purse,
here is my heart, here is my hand. Here is my dream of home.

******

v. Love & Peace (for Lisa Marie)

Love & peace. Anger. Dandelions. Words spiked
& those muddied. With every moment,
the snowstorm clarifies, it ripples.

Love & peace. There must be music every hour.
A hand in darkness touches a hand,
question, smile, sigh. Music always.

Love & peace. Ever there is war, ever
there is laughter. Everyone evolves,
no losers. Transcendence. Ice cream.

Love & peace. The tired talk of daddies &
mammas. The new talk of dancers &
phreaks. What's going on? Do you know?

Love & peace. Enough to suggest a world,
a model for hands to grasp. Release brings
the true flame, what kings & preachers cannot abide.

******

vi. Ceremony (for Lisa Marie)

"We've got to come alive and aware."
--D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1928

<u>i. Ceremony</u>

Tonight, my love, I approach you, by flare,
by crackle, brush of feather, twist of pen,
I approach you, hands opened to a sugared

sky, eyes bright with the hunger of a dream,
I approach you with a heart sturdy as a plank,
with a mind trembly as an ocean breeze.

We mate as tender things melt in the sun,
as outlaws crouch by a fire warming meat,
as a bald preacher starves toward staying union,
as a slumbering beast shifts, & nears its bearing time,
as the king crushes a trio of mushrooms under foot,
as the universe dreams, dissipates, resurrects.

I approach you, tonight, my love, with
laughter, laughter, neither truth nor lie.

ii. Birds

Brush of feathers in a sugared night-sky,
a branch no hand has ever grasped,
a cloud no poem has ever remarked,
one, two, a flock, no hands to reach for
eternity & settle for lips, bricks, paintbrushes—
no hands to ball, to stroke, to craft, to grasp.

iii. Fleshspace

Butterflies from fire swoon the night, crystal
ecstasy aflame, flip & flash of recovered
sight, symbiosis of heart blood & bone,
alone & alive in the world, a beginning.
A gift. How good. A beginning. Now learn
to walk, now pass along to water, to stone.

Now bear an axe, now build a house.
Now feel your heart, now seek a wife.
Now study the fields, now become a seed.
Now cradle your young, now teach her your songs.
Now meet among the trees, tribe & drums.
Now bury your questions, & close your eyes.

iv. Eros

Tonight, my love, & I wonder if any
question is the key, if any fence cut
or wall fell would reveal red leaves,
golden shadows, unguarded eyes.

Once we walked a city street, handed
prayers to the poor, crumbs to
creatures chirping, mewing. Your laughter
taught me new music I could not write
down, music of your smirk, music of your
young breast. Music of sugar & kindness.

No question. No fence. No wall.
Build a house. Become a seed. Close your eyes.

Tonight, my love, teach me to disappear
into your heart, tap & reveal a butterfly
from each of your fingers. Tonight, my love,
teach me the pathless way from our pressed
loins to the stars. The way there & back.

v. Artist's Prayer to His Muse

I seek the singer to become her song,
become the pen she wields, become
the clay she presses. Yours, alive & aware.

I seek you, my muse, my love, to become
the red leaves, the golden shadows,
the unguarded eyes. Laughter, neither truth nor lies.

vi. Muse's Prayer to Her Artist

Broken world, my love, learn from me
to heal it. Language of feathers,
songs of water, scriptures of stone.
Move to a new drumbeat, the disorder
of dancers in a field. Tell them all for me:
the truth reveals nothing but ashes at dawn.

Perfect world, my pilgrim. Red leaves,
golden shadows, unguarded eyes.
The next birth, blood as fierce as always.
Another union, howls of surprise & remembrance.
Grow from the sky, grasp the soil, praise men & stars:

You are always home. You are always home.

******

vii. Frigid

Something happened. A man walked
down the street, smiling at nothing.
Perhaps crackles smartly at the thought
of his true love. Perhaps trembles & stiffens
at the thought of trees dressed in flags,
winter puzzled over like a scripture by the hungry king.

Something happened. A pretty woman laughed
& teased the air. Wisdom sometimes best
collects in puddles & shadows. O yes.
The air white with youth's hurry,
the frigid of solstice soil, hearts in need
tonight no matter the map or governance.

Something happened. A guru sat up
stiffly, a muse caressed & flowed,
the cold restrained its storm. Hunger
prepared her bed, drew her curtains,
I wielded my pen ever knowing not how.

Something happened. Do we know love
better or war? A kiss disputes
battlefield's claims. Every leaf remaining
a remembrance toward the next green
world. Bundled & crafty, tonight
I choose to praise not dispute.

Something happened. Bald fires,
a warrior's ideas. I keep wondering

what the trees are doing. I keep wishing
 more of us would wonder. Then I hear
a woman's laugh & the night is
 full of hooks & tunes again.

Something happened. The pain of
 every day since, every day ever,
love, love, rupture & gestation.
 Yet tonight a reason to summon the coach.
A woman's laugh, & the frigid diminishes,
 & the trees still with us, & we're learning to learn.

******

viii. Resistance

Sing a new world into existence,
 no delay, no linger, sing!
A butterfly, a cannon, a smoke
 of kisses. Make, destroy, your song
matters in this broken world. Your
 doubt matters. Your hands. Your dream.

Sing a world wrapped in crimson,
 drowned in thunder, crowned in green.
Now a rifle for your fears, now a baby,
 now a basket of apples, now a cloud,
now a girl's laughter. Sing with torch
 of words, thump of flesh.

Sing your questions, then bury them
 deep, close your eyes, feel creation
roar from your fingers & thighs,
 sing! & sing! Where blankness shimmers,
utter a war, or a city, or a single branch
 where nests a sparrow, growls a lynx.

Sing a wave to lead the outlaws,
 pipes & puffs & leaping flickers to
oppose the king. Sing a better king,
 a pilgrim unto cosmos, a leading
servant unto oaks & stars. Sing

a lengthless night of candles & eros.

Sing the wilder music no easy hand
may play, music culled from
desert & despair, music that clicks
with scorpion's reach, music a rage
& ecstasy inside a box with no walls,
no sky, no earth, no scripture. Sing! Howl!

Sing a new world til something flickers,
a butterfly with fangs, a preacher's
moan of woods & wings. Sing the touch
in darkness of one hand within another,
a new solstice, immolation. Drowned in thunder,
crowned in green. Sing until your glory catches.

******

ix. Winter Solstice (for Lisa Marie)

Burn, candle. Romance the night. Shatter
this song's heart. Shatter everything.
Torch my fingers, call it love. Burn, candle.
Twist my heart with steel & mercy. Burn.
Help me unsheave the I in me, the us in me,
by rampage, by gleam. By whisper & roar.

Burn, candle. Teach me again the one true
note, the collision, the way, the end.
Shatter my fury. Shatter my empathy.
Make unto ash my memories, & those
of the world. Scorch the cold fields, their
murmuring seeds. Every army. Every dawn. Every touch.

Burn, candle. World brooding hungrily
about thee, dwindle its wish. Dwindle
& dust. Burn, candle. Brush flickers
by my love, her fingers, her laughter,
her magickal sight. Release her singing,
her ink & her moans. Tremble. Burn.

Burn, candle. Shatter my heart, shatter

my instrument, shatter my ground & sky.
Whisper fierce truths will melt in the spring,
leave their stain in the belly, thump anew
by full moon. Burn, candle. Melt fiercely
like new love. Glow strangely like true love.

Burn, candle. Burn! Forests & herds, silos,
& small beds. The dull faces of pilgrims,
fresh-fucked with prayer. The glee & softness
of lovers, wet among berries & lace.
Candle, burn, candle, preach! Suck the air
of the king, same as that of the outlaw.

Burn, candle. Watch us move in procession,
in pairs, in gangs, & alone. Gentle our
flight with thine glow & thine light. Burn
as we do, like a fist, & then teach us
let go. Teach us to shatter our song
as we sing it. How to blank past suffering.

How to blank everything.

******

x. Winter Solstice [continued]
(for Lisa Marie)

How to bless everything. A craving, a vine,
a candle. The spoken. The sung. The silent.
Laugh! Wake up! Ecstasy!

Rhythms tap toward crescendoes, of light
& leaves. The actress smooth to the preacher's
eye. A crisis in scripture. Her voice in the dark.

Night lifts & revolts, flame of lamps &
full moans. Bless everything! Burn with
faith from the ditch. Burn, candle. Continue.

Holy emptiness, the artist's maybe. Then
three strokes light an eye. Three more:
a heart beating. And three more: a world cradled.

Cold fields, & murmuring seeds. Building
sunshine, raising song. Blood of panting,
blood of colors. Now running & rising.

Bless everything! Witches & crows. Laws for
love & believing. Now a mystery. Now a mercy.
What moves one toward another.

******

xi. Winter Solstice [concluded]
(for Lisa Marie)

Teach us let go, we do not know how.
Teach us to praise everything, the glowing
rubble in cities, the lingering music of
other days, prodding dreams, growling loins.
Teach us to shatter, eyesight & physics,
to believe beyond faith, crawl beyond
texts, wonder at ways of fur, leaves,
fins & wings. Wonder blindly & laugh.

What moves one toward another in the
heavy air & bursting earth.
Ask the preacher: he frowns & eludes.
Ask the king: he offers numbers.
Ask the artist: he slinks & hums.
Ask the muse: she smiles & stirs.

A greater music, a greater silence,
a giggling blindness beyond stories
repeated in castles & slums. One mind
dances, understands, tells another,
tells a third. Rejoice! All is maya!
Feed your best into the fire!

Teach us praise everything, we do not
know how. Teach us flow & discard
our thirst. Teach us blindness that
we may touch. Teach us that there
is no news, & never was.

What moves one toward another
  a trembling heavy, sometimes light.
Light the candle: watch it hover.
Regard the landscape: its lack of lack.
Sing up to the sky in its completeness.
Begin to laugh. Begin to shimmer.

A greater music, a greater silence:
  Contrive the thing you must release.
  Til its dream no longer haunts you.
  Til its fruit you no more seek.
  Til it unclasps your hungry hold.

Til forgetting, a scrap, you careen off the path.

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xii. Spectacle (for Lisa Marie)

"The secret of life is metamorphosis & transformation"
—Anaïs Nin

i. Remembrance

Dancing cageless in the full moon's light, a butterfly,
a windraged field, a sometime preacher weeping
for entropy's bite, a pair of lovers twined rootsy
& green, a harlequin disguised as a busy, buzzing
world, an ancient flame still whipping hungrily at the frost:

you will not cease with this world, nor shall I
 quit along your path.

ii. First Dream: Always

We've known each other always, here in
 dream, where morning light ever accumulates
to full moon. Sometimes hidden in the leaves
 we sing without toes or memories.

"The world is perfect. The world is broken.
Repair the world." So chant we with our children.

Once a manic guru hurried me from
your arms. Later a buzzing rage
shrouded you from me. Yet ever there is
union in our joined soul, our love imperial.

"Repair the world, with pebbles & wings.
Repair the world, with chance & delight."

iii. Dance

Your face implodes my old dreams, leaving
a corona of butterflies where scattered
papers yellowed last night. My journey
to you that of clumsy harlequin, blue suit
& stale beard. When naked I fall into
your bed, behold a torso flaking with

hunger, see the chamber & the world darken.
Reveal me to your heart & the open
window, wield my praise, steal my hands,
pulse between my breaths. With your violet
sheets & pink lace, your belly & soul kindred
to the green things of soil & sea, smile once,

twice, as I bring you men's news which
is not news, & learn in time to bring you
honey & milk, apples & lullabies. Learn to empty
my sack of dust & dismay. Fill your empty
emerald bowl with clean water, & relax. Take your
hand, learn to dance, neither leading, neither following.

iv. Second Dream: Alone

After you left, the day devolved to silence,
the opaque fatness between minds &
world, among minds themselves, wherefrom
spring creepers of sadness, fierce bullets

of bone. I kept singing the old one I'd sung
 to you: the old man, his diamond, his daffodils.

The carriages were crowded & slow,
 & my shirt later dappled with marketplace
mud. The silence demonstrated its complexity:
 the way a stray apple fell beneath a
leather boot; the way two men who could be
 twins waited at a streetlight but never spoke.

I thought of you as I collected quills,
 paper, my father's birthday canvas from
the vendors. I thought of you singing
 to our child, of men in red robes holding
hands, the seeds & instructions they bring:
 Repair the world. Dance cageless. Smile.

Wake up! Happiness . . . bowls of cream.
 Flick away the darkling creepers. Crush
the stunted bones. What lies before us
 is where we begin. What lies behind a
rest, a requiem, a useless dismay. What's all
 around the spectacle of hurry, no truth, safety, home.

v. Lock of Hair

All alone. All suffering. Yes. Then a slave
 ducks into a ditch, a ruckus of
sparrows above, lovers exchange words
 unheard, the sun moves among the ragged
clouds, a new pattern emerges. Retreats.
 Is remembered. We remember.

He holds her lock of hair, guards its
 scent hungrily. Scratches poems to
her on rocks, in soil, into his arm.
 He remembers. He dreams. When
the moon is full & someone asks, he says:
 "Yes. I love her. Her eyes are comets.

I see them always." He allows word
 to spread of her, by laziness, by urgency.

Perhaps there is more than one of her.
 Perhaps more than one of him! Us!
We remember! Sometimes. Still he
 sniffs her lock of hair. Waits. Time cruel, time kind.

Time not a relevance. Time a thin
 storybook, fading illustrations, easy
rhymes, the illusion of explanation
 when read or sung night after night.
But now the slaves whisper for more.
 We want to remember! We want to dream!

We want to do more. No longer adhere
 to the solemn fixed dance. No longer
worship the pattern for its easy safety.
 No safety, no time, no pattern at all!
So we let him teach us. . . . And when he fled us,
 & the hurtful ruckus, we kept her lock of hair, but let him go.

vi. Third Dream: Whirlwind

I alone remember the ruby hummingbird
 in a time obsessed with war. Fists & eyes
were ablaze with symbols, while we watched
 more lights blink & windows cloud.
The ruby hummingbird was quick & vulnerable. I remember
 no dreams. Just the ruby hummingbird.

Some sang toward a new world, sought
 the language of oaks, composed a new
alphabet of stars. Some men queried
 the hearts of their women, the giggles of
their children. The ruby hummingbird led me off
 this path, to what fragment or song I alone could make.

A day, a night, a magick. A problem complex
 with wings barely seen. Could I know this
unmoving moving thing? This disappearing
 creature right before me, aweight
with sweet drink? What thoughts, what
 tears? Mine, hers? Whose dreams? Whose?

Days passed harsh with blaring colors,
 kings disputed loyalties to martyrs &
texts. Crowds shook easily to simple
 tunes, shiny rhymes. The ruby hummingbird
came alone, in threes, sometimes not at all.
 I learned what few songs I could make & what many didn't matter.

The bonfires in empty fields raged and roared.
 all night, I hid til the ashes hardly
trembled at dawn. Reading what I
 could, collecting strums, leaving more behind
than I took. One morning the rubyhumming bird
 came, but I did not, my final song complete:

"The perfect world ever coming, the perfect
 world ever here. The perfect world
a sad funny myth. The perfect world a
 whirlwind one can only grasp in hovering
moments, a passing nectar of memories sweet,
 a mystery shared with an absent companion,

a miracle experienced by twined hands, wondering face
 to wondering face."

vii.

My blankness. Your blankness. The pain
 which hovers above the brow, a winged
darkness, a tiny burbling beast. A dread
 flickering. A frost snapping at any lonely light.

My blankness. Your blankness. An old carriage
 travels a man & his decisions. Nearing dawn. No language.

viii. Fourth Dream: Shrine

. . . listen for the many musics between sweetness
 & flail . . . listen for what is listening to you,
how it watches you clenching tighter while trying
 to let go . . .
 "repair the world . . . let it break . . .

repair the world . . . let it go . . ."

song of the shrine, shells on its brick wall,
new powder on its empty path . . . "repair the world
. . . . let it break . . . let it go . . ."

coming to this clearing for a long reminding scent—
an absence—a stillness—relief—remembrance . . .
surely this shrine by a steady hand will one day smoulder . . .

ix. Miracle

Honesty til raw: I love you.
Honesty above all: the world of man
is in pain.
Honesty about war: only kings & slaves
crave it.
Honesty about the earth: she moans
ever, ages past, ages anon, her prodding
fingers against ruin & greed.

Honesty about Art: the best set blaze their
words & dreams alike, burn it all
for a strum, a song, three fingers of true pink shine.

Honesty about Love: the days cluster like
blossoms, a toothy shadow fanging about
only sometimes.

Honesty about Death: the argument set in
the way of something bright, a thing barely
glimpsed.

I love you, with open hands, my craft
aflame within your constellation.

x. Vanilla Lace

Two trees atwist, once stars, once butterflies,
once lovers, once children. Once music.
Always music. A moonwrit scripture ever

completing, a grainy memory where two hands
touch, the helpless romance of quitless love,

while today our hearts still ring childly new.

Sniff the ancient in what we are, sniff the
future in what we hold. Receive history
of our wherefrom, news of our thence.
Beg not our mystery speak its name
aloud or ever, dance cageless, my love,

as stars dapple your cheeks, & vanilla lace
swings from your shoulders.

We mull among the leaves, planning beauty,
sharing need, exchanging pain. Trills
& barks around us, eyes & wings a-sniff
with awareness, we settle awhile with our
need to make, our hunger to change, to hurry

the morning light, to hatch Paradise from
three green twigs.

Only dreams return us to our roots & seeds,
to an endless bath of stillness in sky &
earth, to sunshine's warming song, to midnight's
healing scent. No beast or possession
disturbs us, no word cracks or corrodes our embrace.

We sleep without want. Perfectly. A bell & her echo.

xi. Fifth Dream: Miracle

To play one. True. Note. Muse. Wife. Moonlight.
Slow to a hurry, vibrations more lilac than
copter. One true. Note. Moonlight sipped
from a vessel of remembrance. Stirred of
many strums, fireforests of rhythm, shreds
of melodies, both childly & crone. Maidenly too.
One true note, undulating. You appear. Miracle.

To play one true note. You appear. Miracle.

Thereafter to know you will not cease
with this world, nor shall I quit
along your path. Slower still til along
the path home disappears entirely. Vessel
of remembrance now dust, dust's dream.

One true note, perhaps rather an agony
of power raised, uprooting of oaks,
the hands of men rendered boneless to
build & change. Danger allowed in jungle
& den til neither flesh nor enemy
remains. What suffering truly fears.

You appear. Miracle. Laughter, fertility,
want. The blade & the seed art thine
burden & thine hope. You appear first as
mountains of light, then a winged thing
rapidly clawing dirt. A dark lock of hair
shining in an empty cave dwindling to a fist.

One true note & tonight a mercy shines
in the clear accelerating skies, to warm
my doubtful fingers, trill fiercely unto
my waning heart. You appear. Miracle.
Muse. Wife. Moonlight. Coven of the hungry.
Shells smouldering on a brick wall. Hints of love's fury & joy.

xii. Sixth Dream: Suicide Bridge

Keep moving. Keep laughing. Keep drinking
water. Beg of noone yet open your hands
to all.

Keep a candle inside a box. Keep it lit
from the one within. Snowfall &
treebranch, wind & hurry. Nearing.

Because you did not jump that day,
call a young arc your finale, everything
became possible. What is holy shook fiercely.

Keep wiggling. Keep working. Stroke the soil,

caress the sky. Be a lover all the time.
Dare a bullet. Lick a dream.

Gather a sheaf of nocturnes for
firelight. Let the guru within you
live & die & die & live again.

Take the candle from the box.
Take the feather. Remove the shell.
Music in a vessel. Vessel made of starlight.

Keep shimmering. Keep raining.
Save a formula for belief, & one
for annihilation. Howls & blood are louder.

Light your candle & walk outside.
Learn again how to give away warmth,
how to sing with tapping rocks in streams.

Because you did not jump, with your
nocturnes & lace, something rust began
to moan. A hidden wound began to confess.

Keep dancing. Keep mocking. Keep the decorated dollar
that I gave you. Keep my heart. Keep
your own. Let me listen. Share it. Thank you.

Many candles, hear them cry. The night
is beating, all that hear it, sigh.
All that hear it, struggle. Here we are. Each unknown.

Many jump, every day. A tangle. A shotgun.
A snicker. A purr. Many jump, & jump
again. Snow's still coming. Wake up now!

Keep one hand on the wheel, in case
of gophers. Keep one hand off, in case
of God. Be ready to shift between them.

Candles in the forest. Candles in the sky.
Candles burn the troublesome nocturnes.
Candles alight, & more keep coming.

Did I tell you that I jumped? Years ago,
another stanza. I learned how that night,
& thereafter. Love became a math. Art was a puzzle.

Keep loving me, keep licking & dreaming &
keep your hands open to all, & I will
learn too, & we will teach others.

Candles in tonight's bedchamber.
My lingering voice. Let it touch you.
My hurrying songs. Slow them. See what they mean.

See what they are, these songs that
protect you, that guide you, that call
you their own. No more distance. No more worry.

Just two hearts that brave to jump.
Two hearts that brave to live.

[To be continued in *Cenacle* / 49 / October 2003]

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ALAN WATTS

Psychedelics and Religious Experience

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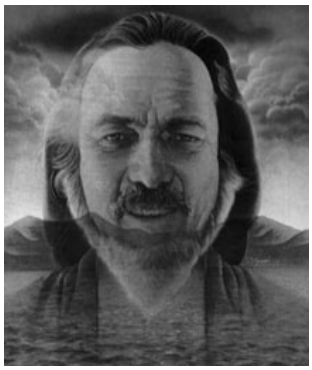

The experiences resulting from the use of psychedelic drugs are often described in religious terms. They are therefore of interest to those like myself who, in the tradition of William James,[1] are concerned with the psychology of religion. For more than thirty years I have been studying the causes, the consequences, and the conditions of those peculiar states of consciousness in which the individual discovers himself to be one continuous process with God, with the Universe, with the Ground of Being, or whatever name he may use by cultural conditioning or personal preference for the ultimate and eternal reality. We have no satisfactory and definitive name for experiences of this kind. The terms "religious experience," "mystical experience," and "cosmic consciousness" are all too vague and comprehensive to denote that specific mode of consciousness which, to those who have known it, is as real and overwhelming as falling in love. This article describes such states of consciousness induced by psychedelic drugs, although they are virtually indistinguishable from genuine mystical experience. The article then discusses objections to the use of psychedelic drugs that arise mainly from the opposition between mystical values and the traditional religious and secular values of Western society.

The Psychedelic Experience

The idea of mystical experiences resulting from drug use is not readily accepted in Western societies. Western culture has, historically, a particular fascination with the value and virtue of man as an individual, self-determining, responsible ego, controlling himself and his world by the power of conscious effort and will. Nothing, then, could be more repugnant to this cultural tradition than the notion of spiritual or psychological growth through the use of drugs. A "drugged" person is by definition dimmed in consciousness, fogged in judgment, and deprived of will. But not all psychotropic (consciousness-changing) chemicals are narcotic and soporific, as are alcohol, opiates, and barbiturates. The effects of what are now

[1] See W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

called psychedelic (mind-manifesting) chemicals differ from those of alcohol as laughter differs from rage, or delight from depression. There is really no analogy between being "high" on LSD and "drunk" on bourbon. True, no one in either state should drive a car, but neither should one drive while reading a book, playing a violin, or making love. Certain creative activities and states of mind demand a concentration and devotion that are simply incompatible with piloting a death-dealing engine along a highway.

I myself have experimented with five of the principal psychedelics: LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, dimethyl-tryptamine (DMT), and cannabis. I have done so, as William James tried nitrous oxide, to see if they could help me in identifying what might be called the "essential" or "active" ingredients of the mystical experience. For almost all the classical literature on mysticism is vague, not only in describing the experience, but also in showing rational connections between the experience itself and the various traditional methods recommended to induce it: fasting, concentration, breathing exercises, prayers, incantations, and dances. A traditional master of Zen or Yoga, when asked why such-and-such practices lead or predispose one to the mystical experience, always responds, "This is the way my teacher gave it to me. This is the way I found out. If you're seriously interested, try it for yourself." This answer hardly satisfies an impertinent, scientifically minded, and intellectually curious Westerner. It reminds him of archaic medical prescriptions compounding five salamanders, powdered gallows rope, three boiled bats, a scruple of phosphorus, three pinches of henbane, and a dollop of dragon dung dropped when the moon was in Pisces. Maybe it worked, but what was the essential ingredient?

It struck me, therefore, that if any of the psychedelic chemicals would in fact predispose my consciousness to the mystical experience, I could use them as instruments for studying and describing that experience as one uses a microscope for bacteriology, even though the microscope is an "artificial" and "unnatural" contrivance which might be said to "distort" the vision of the naked eye. However, when I was first invited to test the mystical qualities of LSD-25 by Dr. Keith Ditman of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic at UCLA Medical School, I was unwilling to believe that any mere chemical could induce a genuine mystical experience. At most, it might bring about a state of spiritual insight analogous to swimming with water wings. Indeed, my first experiment with LSD-25 was not mystical. It was an intensely interesting aesthetic and intellectual experience that challenged my powers of analysis and careful description to the utmost.

Some months later, in 1959, I tried LSD-25 again with Drs. Sterling Bunnell and Michael Agron, who were then associated with the Langley-Porter Clinic, in San Francisco. In the course of two experiments I was amazed and somewhat embarrassed to find myself going through states of consciousness that corresponded precisely with every description of major mystical experiences that I had ever read.[2]

[2] An excellent anthology of such experiences is R. Johnson, *Watcher on the Hills* (1959).

Furthermore, they exceeded both in depth and in a peculiar quality of unexpectedness the three "natural and spontaneous" experiences of this kind that had happened to me in previous years.

Through subsequent experimentation with LSD-25 and the other chemicals named above (with the exception of DMT, which I find amusing but relatively uninteresting), I found I could move with ease into the state of "cosmic consciousness," and in due course became less and less dependent on the chemicals themselves for "tuning in" to this particular wave length of experience. Of the five psychedelics tried, I found that LSD-25 and cannabis suited my purposes best. Of these two, the latter—cannabis—which I had to use abroad in countries where it is not outlawed, proved to be the better. It does not induce bizarre alterations of sensory perception, and medical studies indicate that it may not, save in great excess, have the dangerous side effects of LSD.

For the purposes of this study, in describing my experiences with psychedelic drugs I avoid the occasional and incidental bizarre alterations of sense perception that psychedelic chemicals may induce. I am concerned, rather, with the fundamental alterations of the normal, socially induced consciousness of one's own existence and relation to the external world. I am trying to delineate the basic principles of psychedelic awareness. But I must add that I can speak only for myself. The quality of these experiences depends considerably upon one's prior orientation and attitude to life, although the now voluminous descriptive literature of these experiences accords quite remarkably with my own.

Almost invariably, my experiments with psychedelics have had four dominant characteristics. I shall try to explain them in the expectation that the reader will say, at least of the second and third, "Why, that's obvious! No one needs a drug to see that." Quite so, but every insight has degrees of intensity. There can be obvious-1 and obvious-2, and the latter comes on with shattering clarity, manifesting its implications in every sphere and dimension of our existence.

The first characteristic is a slowing down of time, a *concentration in the present*. One's normally compulsive concern for the future decreases, and one becomes aware of the enormous importance and interest of what is happening at the moment. Other people, going about their business on the streets, seem to be slightly crazy, failing to realize that the whole point of life is to be fully aware of it as it happens. One therefore relaxes, almost luxuriously, into studying the colors in a glass of water, or in listening to the now highly articulate vibration of every note played on an oboe or sung by a voice.

From the pragmatic standpoint of our culture, such an attitude is very bad for business. It might lead to improvidence, lack of foresight, diminished sales of insurance policies, and abandoned savings accounts. Yet this is just the corrective that our culture needs. No one is more fatuously impractical than the "successful" executive who spends his whole life absorbed in frantic paper work with the objective of retiring in comfort at sixty-five, when it will all be too late. Only those who have cultivated the art of living completely in the present have any use for

making plans for the future, for when the plans mature they will be able to enjoy the results. "Tomorrow never comes." I have never yet heard a preacher urging his congregation to practice that section of the Sermon on the Mount which begins, "Be not anxious for the morrow. . . ." The truth is that people who live for the future are, as we say of the insane, "not quite all there"—or here: by over-eagerness they are perpetually missing the point. Foresight is bought at the price of anxiety, and when overused it destroys all its own advantages.

The second characteristic I will call *awareness of polarity*. This is the vivid realization that states, things, and events that we ordinarily call opposite are interdependent, like back and front, or the poles of a magnet. By polar awareness one sees that things which are explicitly different are implicitly one: self and other, subject and object, left and right, male and female—and then, a little more surprisingly, solid and space, figure and background, pulse and interval, saints and sinners, police and criminals, in-groups and out-groups. Each is definable only in terms of the other, and they go together transactionally, like buying and selling, for there is no sale without a purchase, and no purchase without a sale. As this awareness becomes increasingly intense, you feel that you yourself are polarized with the external universe in such a way that you imply each other. Your push is its pull, and its push is your pull—as when you move the steering wheel of a car. Are you pushing it or pulling it?

At first, this is a very odd sensation, not unlike hearing your own voice played back to you on an electronic system immediately after you have spoken. You become confused, and wait for *it* to go on! Similarly, you feel that you are something being done by the universe, yet that the universe is equally something being done by you—which is true, at least in the neurological sense that the peculiar structure of our brains translates the sun into light, and air vibrations into sound. Our normal sensation of relationship to the outside world is that sometimes I push it, and sometimes it pushes me. But if the two are actually one, where does action begin and responsibility rest? If the universe is doing me, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, I will still remember the English language? If I am doing it, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, my brain will know how to turn the sun into light? From such unfamiliar sensations as these, the psychedelic experience can generate confusion, paranoia, and terror—even though the individual is feeling his relationship to the world exactly as it would be described by a biologist, ecologist, or physicist, for he is feeling himself as the unified field of organism and environment.

The third characteristic, arising from the second, is *awareness of relativity*. I see that I am a link in an infinite hierarchy of processes and beings, ranging from molecules through bacteria and insects to human beings, and, maybe, to angels and gods—a hierarchy in which every level is in effect the same situation. For example, the poor man worries about money while the rich man worries about his health: the worry is the same, but the difference is in its substance or dimension. I realize that fruit flies must think of themselves as people, because, like ourselves, they find

themselves in the middle of their own world—with immeasurably greater things above and smaller things below. To us, they all look alike and seem to have no personality—as do the Chinese when we have not lived among them. Yet fruit flies must see just as many subtle distinctions among themselves as we among ourselves.

From this it is but a short step to the realization that all forms of life and being are simply variations on a single theme: we are all in fact one being doing the same thing in as many different ways as possible. As the French proverb goes, *plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose* (the more it varies, the more it is one). I see, further, that feeling threatened by the inevitability of death is really the same experience as feeling alive, and that as all beings are feeling this everywhere, they are all just as much "I" as myself. Yet the "I" feeling, to be felt at all, must always be a sensation relative to the "other"—to something beyond its control and experience. To be at all, it must begin and end. But the intellectual jump that mystical and psychedelic experiences make here is in enabling you to see that all these myriad I-centers are yourself—not, indeed, your personal and superficially conscious ego, but what Hindus call the *paramatman*, the Self of all selves.[3] As the retina enables us to see countless pulses of energy as a single light, so the mystical experience shows us innumerable individuals as a single Self.

The fourth characteristic is *awareness of eternal energy*, often in the form of intense white light, which seems to be both the current in your nerves and that mysterious e which equals mc^2. This may sound like megalomania or delusion of grandeur—but one sees quite clearly that all existence is a single energy, and that this energy is one's own being. Of course there is death as well as life, because energy is a pulsation, and just as waves must have both crests and troughs, the experience of existing must go on and off. Basically, therefore, there is simply nothing to worry about, because you yourself are the eternal energy of the universe playing hide-and-seek (off-and-on) with itself. At root, you are the Godhead, for God is all that there is. Quoting Isaiah just a little out of context: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create the darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things."[4] This is the sense of the fundamental tenet of Hinduism, *Tat tram asi* —"That (i.e., "that subtle Being of which this whole universe is composed") art thou."[5] A classical case of this experience, from the West, is in Tennyson's *Memoirs*:

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro' repeating my own

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[3] Thus Hinduism regards the universe not as an artifact, but as an immense drama in which the One Actor (the *paramatman* or *brakman*) plays all the parts, which are his (or "its") masks or personae. The sensation of being only this one particular self, John Doe, is due to the Actor's total absorption in playing this and every other part. For fuller exposition, see S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (1927); H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (1951), pp. 355-463. A popular version is in A. Watts, *The Book—On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (1966).

[4] Isaiah 45: 6, 7.

[5] Chandogya Upanishad 6.15.3.

name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life. [6]

Obviously, these characteristics of the psychedelic experience, as I have known it, are aspects of a single state of consciousness—for I have been describing the same thing from different angles. The descriptions attempt to convey the reality of the experience, but in doing so they also suggest some of the inconsistencies between such experience and the current values of society.

Opposition to Psychedelic Drugs

Resistance to allowing use of psychedelic drugs originates in both religious and secular values. The difficulty in describing psychedelic experiences in traditional religious terms suggests one ground of opposition. The Westerner must borrow such words as *samadhi* or *moksha* from the Hindus, or *satori* or *kensho* from the Japanese, to describe the experience of oneness with the universe. We have no appropriate word because our own Jewish and Christian theologies will not accept the idea that man's inmost self can be identical with the Godhead, even though Christians may insist that this was true in the unique instance of Jesus Christ. Jews and Christians think of God in political and monarchical terms, as the supreme governor of the universe, the ultimate boss. Obviously, it is both socially unacceptable and logically preposterous for a particular individual to claim that he, in person, is the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the world—to be accorded suitable recognition and honor.

Such an imperial and kingly concept of the ultimate reality, however, is neither necessary nor universal. The Hindus and the Chinese have no difficulty in conceiving of an identity of the self and the Godhead. For most Asians, other than Muslims, the Godhead moves and manifests the world in much the same way that a centipede manipulates a hundred legs—spontaneously, without deliberation or calculation. In other words, they conceive the universe by analogy with an organism as distinct from a mechanism. They do not see it as an artifact or construct under the conscious direction of some supreme technician, engineer, or architect.

If, however, in the context of Christian or Jewish tradition, an individual declares himself to be one with God, he must be dubbed blasphemous (subversive) or insane. Such a mystical experience is a clear threat to traditional religious concepts. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has a monarchical image of God, and monarchs, who rule by force, fear nothing more than insubordination. The Church

[6] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *A Memoir by His Son* (1898), 320.

has therefore always been highly suspicious of mystics, because they seem to be insubordinate and to claim equality or, worse, identity with God. For this reason, John Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart were condemned as heretics. This was also why the Quakers faced opposition for their doctrine of the Inward Light, and for their refusal to remove hats in church and in court. A few occasional mystics may be all right so long as they watch their language, like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who maintained, shall we say, a metaphysical distance of respect between themselves and their heavenly King. Nothing, however, could be more alarming to the ecclesiastical hierarchy than a popular outbreak of mysticism, for this might well amount to setting up a democracy in the kingdom of heaven—and such alarm would be shared equally by Catholics, Jews, and fundamentalist Protestants.

The monarchical image of God, with its implicit distaste for religious insubordination, has a more pervasive impact than many Christians might admit. The thrones of kings have walls immediately behind them, and all who present themselves at court must prostrate themselves or kneel, because this is an awkward position from which to make a sudden attack. It has perhaps never occurred to Christians that when they design a church on the model of a royal court (basilica) and prescribe church ritual, they are implying that God, like a human monarch, is afraid. This is also implied by flattery in prayers:

O Lord our heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth: most heartily we beseech thee with thy favor to behold . . . .[7]

The Western man who claims consciousness of oneness with God or the universe thus clashes with his society's concept of religion. In most Asian cultures, however, such a man will be congratulated as having penetrated the true secret of life. He has arrived, by chance or by some such discipline as Yoga or Zen meditation, at a state of consciousness in which he experiences directly and vividly what our own scientists know to be true in theory. For the ecologist, the biologist, and the physicist know (but seldom feel) that every organism constitutes a single field of behavior, or process, with its environment. There is no way of separating what any given organism is doing from what its environment is doing, for which reason ecologists speak not of organisms in environments but of organism-environments. Thus the words "I" and "self" should properly mean what the whole universe is doing at this particular "here-and-now" called John Doe.

The kingly concept of God makes identity of self and God, or self and universe, inconceivable in Western religious terms. The difference between Eastern and Western concepts of man and his universe, however, extends beyond strictly

[7] A Prayer for the King's Majesty, Order for Morning Prayer, *Book of Common Prayer* (Church of England, 1904).

religious concepts. The Western scientist may rationally perceive the idea of organism-environment, but he does not ordinarily feel this to be true. By cultural and social conditioning, he has been hypnotized into experiencing himself as an ego—as an isolated center of consciousness and will inside a bag of skin, confronting an external and alien world. We say, "I came into this world." But we did nothing of the kind. We came out of it in just the same way that fruit comes out of trees. Our galaxy, our cosmos, "peoples" in the same way that an apple tree "apples."

Such a vision of the universe clashes with the idea of a monarchical God, with the concept of the separate ego, and even with the secular, atheist/agnostic mentality, which derives its common sense from the mythology of nineteenth-century scientist. According to this view, the universe is a mindless mechanism and man a sort of accidental microorganism infesting a minute globular rock that revolves about an unimportant star on the outer fringe of one of the minor galaxies. This "put-down" theory of man is extremely common among such quasi-scientists as sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, most of whom are still thinking of the world in terms of Newtonian mechanics, and have never really caught up with the ideas of Einstein and Bohr, Oppenheimer and Schrödinger. Thus to the ordinary institutional-type psychiatrist, any patient who gives the least hint of mystical or religious experience is automatically diagnosed as deranged. From the standpoint of the mechanistic religion, he is a heretic and is given electroshock therapy as an up-to-date form of thumbscrew and rack. And, incidentally, it is just this kind of quasi-scientist who, as consultant to government and law-enforcement agencies, dictates official policies on the use of psychedelic chemicals.

Inability to accept the mystic experience is more than an intellectual handicap. Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination. For in a civilization equipped with immense technological power, the sense of alienation between man and nature leads to the use of technology in a hostile spirit—to the "conquest" of nature instead of intelligent co-operation with nature. The result is that we are eroding and destroying our environment, spreading Los Angelization instead of civilization. This is the major threat overhanging Western, technological culture, and no amount of reasoning or doom-preaching seems to help. We simply do not respond to the prophetic and moralizing techniques of conversion upon which Jews and Christians have always relied. But people have an obscure sense of what is good for them—call it "unconscious self-healing," "survival instinct," "positive growth potential," or what you will. Among the educated young there is therefore a startling and unprecedented interest in the transformation of human consciousness. All over the Western world publishers are selling millions of books dealing with Yoga, Vedanta, Zen Buddhism, and the chemical mysticism of psychedelic drugs, and I have come to believe that the whole "hip" subculture, however misguided in some of its manifestations, is the earnest and responsible effort of young people to correct the self-destroying course of industrial civilization.

The content of the mystical experience is thus inconsistent with both the

religious and secular concepts of traditional Western thought. Moreover, mystical experiences often result in attitudes that threaten the authority not only of established churches, but also of secular society. Unafraid of death and deficient in worldly ambition, those who have undergone mystical experiences are impervious to threats and promises. Moreover, their sense of the relativity of good and evil arouses the suspicion that they lack both conscience and respect for law. Use of psychedelics in the United States by a literate bourgeoisie means that an important segment of the population is indifferent to society's traditional rewards and sanctions.

In theory, the existence within our secular society of a group that does not accept conventional values is consistent with our political vision. But one of the great problems of the United States, legally and politically, is that we have never quite had the courage of our convictions. The Republic is founded on the marvelously sane principle that a human community can exist and prosper only on a basis of mutual trust. Metaphysically, the American Revolution was a rejection of the dogma of Original Sin, which is the notion that because you cannot trust yourself or other people, there must be some Superior Authority to keep us all in order. The dogma was rejected because, if it is true that we cannot trust ourselves and others, it follows that we cannot trust the Superior Authority which we ourselves conceive and obey, and that the very idea of our own untrustworthiness is unreliable!

Citizens of the United States believe, or are supposed to believe, that a republic is the best form of government. Yet vast confusion arises from trying to be republican in politics and monarchist in religion. How can a republic be the best form of government if the universe, heaven, and hell are a monarchy?[8] Thus, despite the theory of government by consent, based upon mutual trust, the peoples of the United States retain, from the authoritarian backgrounds of their religions or national origins, an utterly naïve faith in law as some sort of supernatural and paternalistic power. "There ought to be a law against it!" Our law-enforcement officers are therefore confused, hindered, and bewildered—not to mention corrupted—by being asked to enforce sumptuary laws, often of ecclesiastical origin, that vast numbers of people have no intention of obeying and that, in any case, are immensely difficult or simply impossible to enforce—for example, the barring of anything so undetectable as LSD-25 from international and interstate commerce.

Finally, there are two specific objections to use of psychedelic drugs. First, use of these drugs may be dangerous. However, every worth-while exploration is dangerous—climbing mountains, testing aircraft, rocketing into outer space, skin diving, or collecting botanical specimens in jungles. But if you value knowledge and

[8] Thus, until quite recently, belief in a Supreme Being was a legal test of valid conscientious objection to military service. The implication was that the individual objector found himself bound to obey a higher echelon of command than the President and Congress. The analogy is military and monarchical, and therefore objectors who, as Buddhists or naturalists, held an organic theory of the universe often had difficulty in obtaining recognition.

the actual delight of exploration more than mere duration of uneventful life, you are willing to take the risks. It is not really healthy for monks to practice fasting, and it was hardly hygienic for Jesus to get himself crucified, but these are risks taken in the course of spiritual adventures. Today the adventurous young are taking risks in exploring the psyche, testing their mettle at the task just as, in times past, they have tested it—more violently—in hunting, dueling, hot-rod racing, and playing football. What they need is not prohibitions and policemen, but the most intelligent encouragement and advice that can be found.

Second, drug use may be criticized as an escape from reality. However, this criticism assumes unjustly that the mystical experiences themselves are escapist or unreal. LSD, in particular, is by no means a soft and cushy escape from reality. It can very easily be an experience in which you have to test your soul against all the devils in hell. For me, it has been at times an experience in which I was at once completely lost in the corridors of the mind and yet relating that very lostness to the exact order of logic and language, simultaneously very mad and very sane. But beyond these occasional lost and insane episodes, there are the experiences of the world as a system of total harmony and glory, and the discipline of relating these to the order of logic and language must somehow explain how what William Blake called that "energy which is eternal delight" can consist with the misery and suffering of everyday life.[9]

The undoubted mystical and religious intent of most users of the psychedelics, even if some of these substances should be proved injurious to physical health, requires that their free and responsible use be exempt from legal restraint in any republic that maintains a constitutional separation of church and state.[10] To the extent that mystical experience conforms with the tradition of genuine religious involvement, and to the extent that psychedelics induce that experience, users are entitled to some constitutional protection. Also, to the extent that research in the

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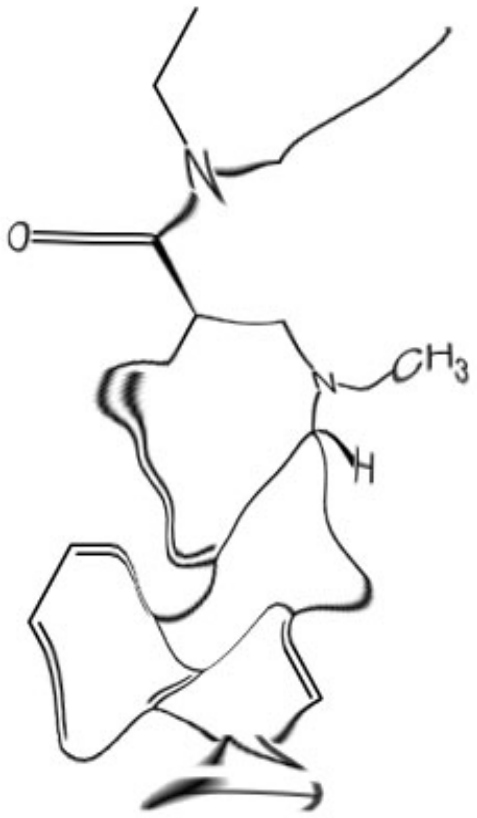
[9] This is discussed at length in A. Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (1962).

[10] "Responsible" in the sense that such substances be taken by or administered to consenting adults only. The user of cannabis, in particular, is apt to have peculiar difficulties in establishing his "undoubted mystical and religious intent" in court. Having committed so loathsome and serious a felony, his chances of clemency are better if he assumes a repentant demeanor, which is quite inconsistent with the sincere belief that his use of cannabis was religious. On the other hand, if he insists unrepentantly that he looks upon such use as a religious sacrament, many judges will declare that they "dislike his attitude," finding it truculent and lacking in appreciation of the gravity of the crime, and the sentence will be that much harsher. The accused is therefore put in a "double-bind" situation, in which he is "damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't." Furthermore, religious integrity—as in conscientious objection—is generally tested and established by membership in some church or religious organization with a substantial following. But the felonious status of cannabis is such that grave suspicion would be cast upon all individuals forming such an organization, and the test cannot therefore be fulfilled. It is generally forgotten that our guarantees of religious freedom were designed to protect precisely those who were not members of established denominations, but rather such (then) screwball and subversive individuals as Quakers, Shakers, Levellers, and Anabaptists. There is little question that those who use cannabis or other psychedelics with religious intent are now members of a persecuted religion which appears to the rest of society as a grave menace to "mental health," as distinct from the old-fashioned "immortal soul." But it's the same old story.

psychology of religion can utilize such drugs, students of the human mind must be free to use them. Under present laws, I, as an experienced student of the psychology of religion, can no longer pursue research in the field. This is a barbarous restriction of spiritual and intellectual freedom, suggesting that the legal system of the United States is, after all, in tacit alliance with the monarchical theory of the universe, and will, therefore, prohibit and persecute religious ideas and practices based on an organic and unitary vision of the universe.[11]



[11] Amerindians belonging to the Native American Church who employ the psychedelic peyote cactus in their rituals, are firmly opposed to any government control of this plant, even if they should be guaranteed the right to its use. They feel that peyote is a natural gift of God to mankind, and especially to natives of the land where it grows, and that no government has a right to interfere with its use The same argument might be made on behalf of cannabis, or the mushroom *Psilocybe mexicana Heim*. All these things are natural plants, not processed or synthesized drugs, and by what authority can individuals be prevented from eating them? There is no law against eating or growing the mushroom *Amanita pantherina*, even though it is fatally poisonous and only experts can distinguish it from a common edible mushroom. This case can be made even from the standpoint of believers in the monarchical universe of Judaism and Christianity, for it is a basic principle of both religions, derived from Genesis, that all natural substances created by God are inherently good, and that evil can arise only in their misuse. Thus laws against mere possession, or even cultivation, of these plants are in basic conflict with biblical principles. Criminal conviction of those who employ these plants should be based on proven misuse. "And God said 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for meat .... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Ric Amante lives in Maine. Perhaps. Such was his plan when last I spoke to him by phone in about December 2002. His poem "Another World is Possible" was written by my request to speak toward an ideal many in the counterculture bear. Thank you, Ric, and I'm still on the beam, brother. I hope you are too, and intend sometime soon to find out for sure.

George W. Bush lives in Washington, D.C. Many wish he did not, and plan in 2004 to use every legal means available to send him back to Texas, Connecticut, or wherever he happens to call home at a given moment.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. The poems in this issue are her first to appear in *The Cenacle*, and long-anticipated. And many more to come, is my simple vow. I'll keep it too.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Plainville, Connecticut. This is a small town he does not fit too well with. It is where he is healing from hurts great and small, recent and old. It is wherefrom he will emerge in time, with a sincere thank you given, and a faith that he will not return.

Alan Watts was born in England in 1915 and became widely recognized for his Zen writings. He died in 1973 at his home in California. He is highly regarded as one of the leading figures of the psychedelic revolution and continues to be admired by many.

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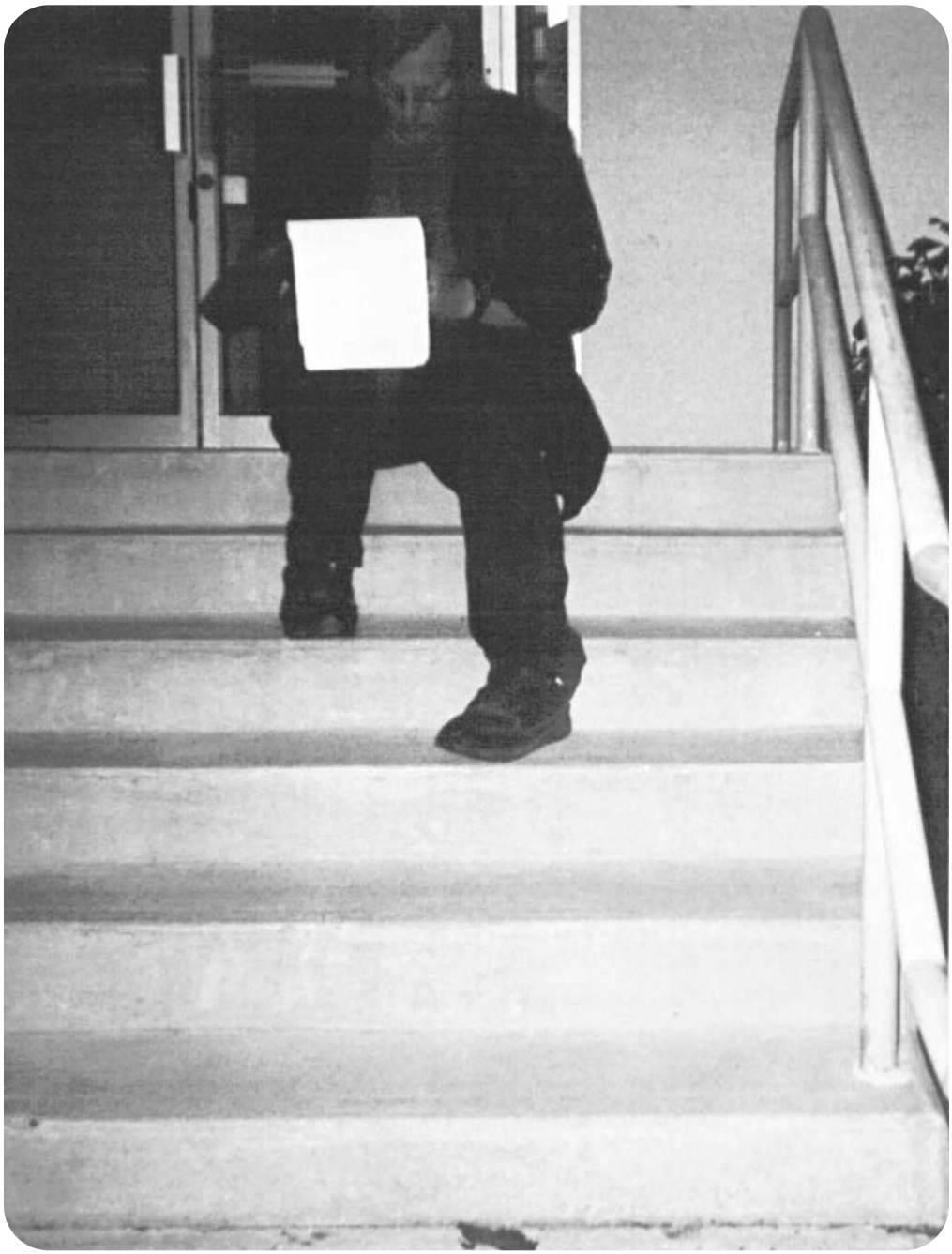

when the ground gives way
you have to pray
to the unknown
and hope it's real . . .